WINTER 1989 COMPLIMENTARY COPY

PC leisure

The Complete Guide To MS-DOS Entertainment

OVER 40 GAMES REVIEWED!

▶From Page 29

WINDFALL

A Newcomer's Guide To Free Software

▶Turn To Page 18

SPEAK IN TONGUES

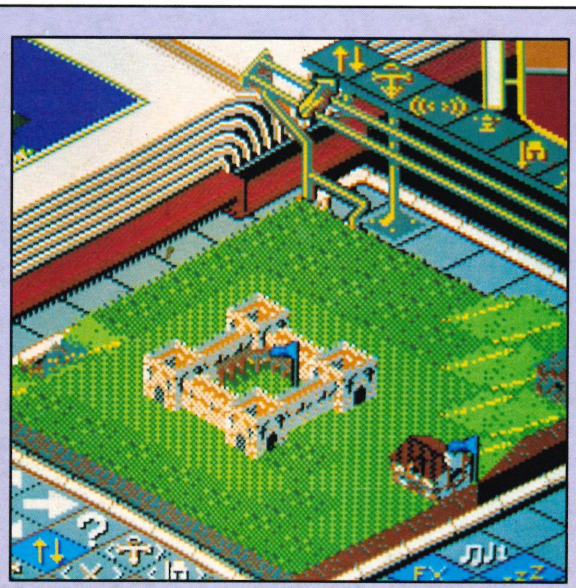
Learn The Lingo

▶See Page 12

TURNING ON TO ENTERTAINMENT

Transform Your PC Into A Complete Leisure System

▶How? Page 6

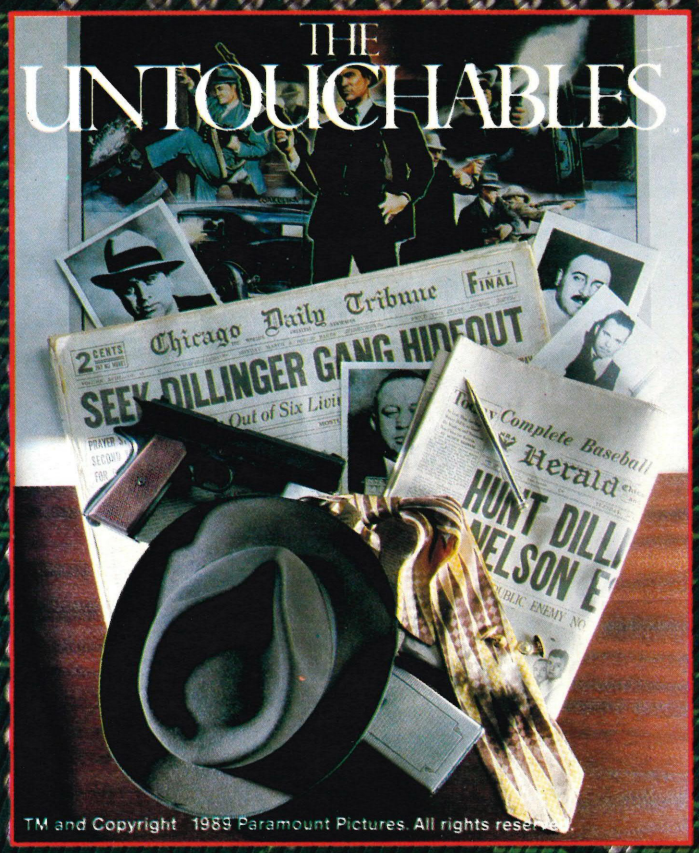


A Gift From The Gods? POPULOUS GOES FORTH

▶Page 30

PLAYFUL

FOR YOUR PC



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INTELLIGENCE

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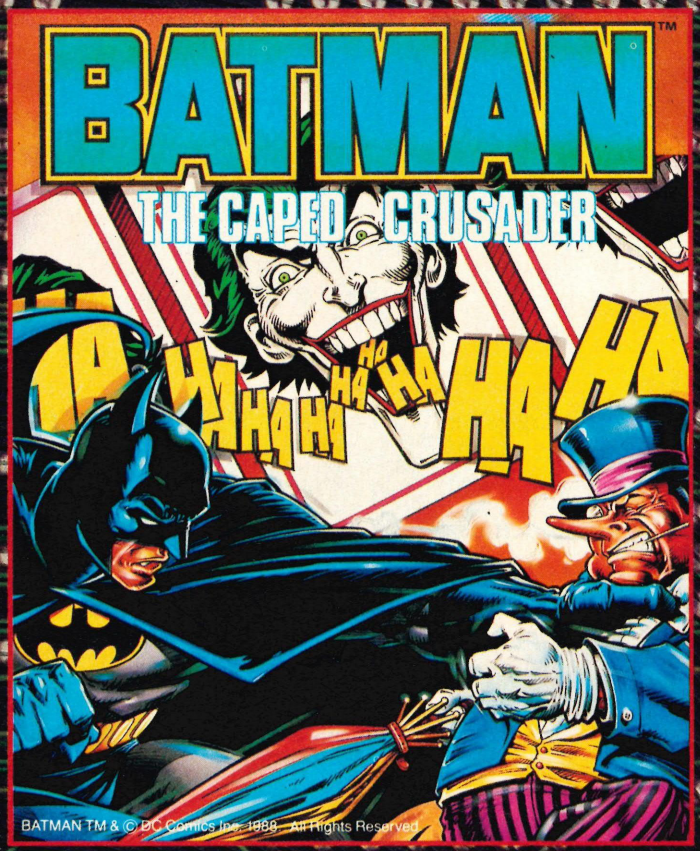

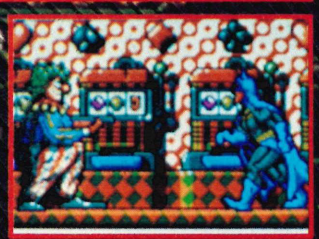

"Special FX programmed the game and have done a great job, recreating the character of the originals with a hint of humour".
Amiga User Int.

"The characters and backgrounds are striking – each are superlative – the Amiga features a soundtrack in glorious remixed stereo".
The One

T.V. shots taken from various computer formats.

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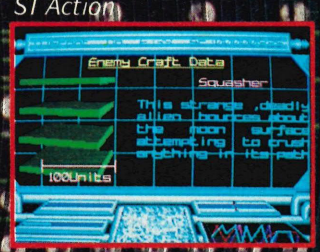
ZZAP Sizzler

"... scrolling 3D graphics, the most impressive I've seen on the ST ... a great arcade formula and clever graphics ... an excellent game that will keep you playing for quite some time".
ST Action



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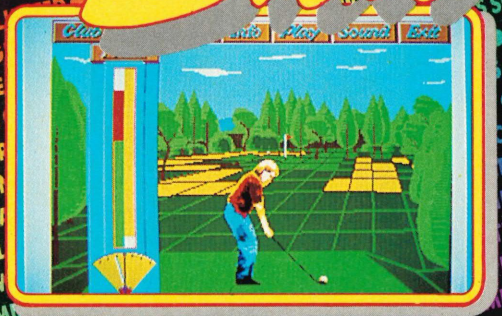
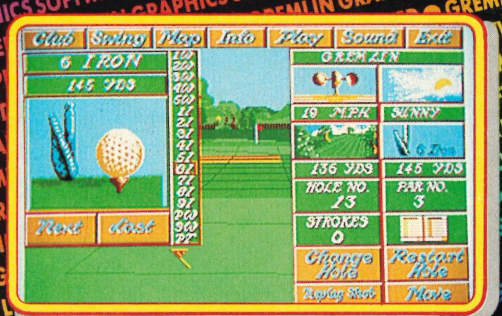
Greg Norman's ULTIMATE GOLF





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Greg Norman
"The Great White Shark"

CONTENTS

PC leisure
The Complete Guide to MS-Dos Entertainment

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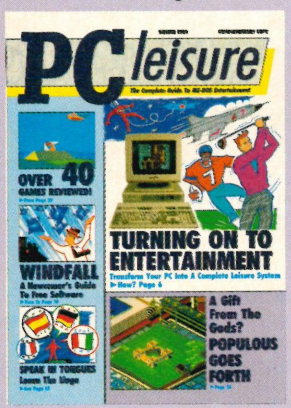

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Just because it's your best friend in the office, that doesn't mean that your hard-working PC-compatible doesn't have a social side too – inside every MS-DOS computer, there's a complete home entertainment system just waiting to do its stuff. And it's not that difficult to coax it out either: depending on your investment, the same computer can become anything from a basic games machine right up to a full-colour, stereophonic arcade beater – and that's only on the games side. Those who would prefer to use their spare time for something a little more constructive can use that same 'dull' machine to learn a language, teach the children, plan holidays, help with the garden... the list is already extensive – and it's growing rapidly. And that's where PC Leisure comes in. We're here to inform you of every development that takes place in entertainment computing for IBM-compatible machines. We're not saying that this is an exhaustive guide, but we do hope that it provides a good taster for things to come, and maybe that it will change the way you think about your electronic workhorse. But what do you think? Drop us a line at the address on this page to let us know – or, better still, complete and return the questionnaire on page 15 and you could be rewarded with a complete games starter pack or a bundle of software for your trouble.

6
UPGRADE – LOAD UP – DROP OUT
The beginner's guide to beginning...

12
THE TOWER OF BABEL
Prepare for 1992 with the Kosmos range of language tutors.

15
QUESTIONNAIRE
Your right to reply – and a chance for a quick start into the world of PC gaming.

18
IT'S RAINING COMMS AND DOS
Free (and not-so-free) software – the whos, whys and wheres.

22
WHICH?
Take to the road as five driving simulators are compared and contrasted.

24
SCHOOL'S OUT
Start 'em early, as Database opens the doors to its Fun School series for a second term.

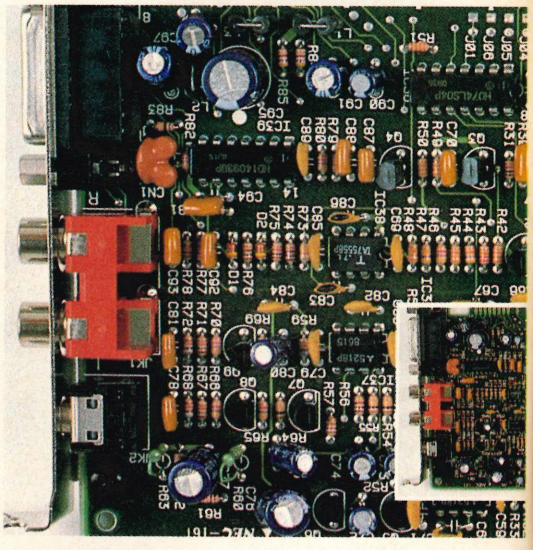
29
REVIEW
More games than you can shake a joystick at.

47
QUEST FOR ADVENTURE
The States' finest spills the beans on past, present and a Hollywood future.

FEATURE

Depressed with dBase? Loathsome of Lotus? Weary of WordStar? Then join Rob Beattie in a voyage of exploration as he attempts to convert his humble PC into the complete entertainment system.

UPGRADE LOAD UP DROP OUT



In the pages that follow, we're going to do the impossible. We're going to take that crusty personal computer that sits on your desk grinding dully away at a spreadsheet or a database and turn it into a vicious, mind-bending games machines fit to frighten the life out of the current flavours of the month, Atari's ST and Commodore's Amiga.

To complete this task we'll need a sharp eye, keen wits, perseverance, and – unfortunately – cash. We'll try to keep that part to a minimum, but in the end you're going to have to part with a few green ones to get the required results. But as you'll see, it's worth the investment.

Here's the ground we're going to cover:

- Why the PC is such a cold fish compared to every other computer on the market.
- How to change all that.
- All you need to know about different graphics standards in about 30 seconds.
- Loud noises.
- The serious flash stuff (even louder noises).
- The Fab Four – typical games setups to suit every pocket.

By the end, you'll believe a PC can fly.

IN THE BEGINNING

It would be hard to think of something that's got a more blue-suit, business image than an IBM Personal Computer – the machine that was born with a golden calculator in its mouth and a shine on its shoes. Yet, if you go back to '81 when IBM first launched the thing in the States, it was initially marketed as a home computer.

Early publicity shots show two all-American kids lying on the floor gazing at a PC plugged into a television set; it even came with a cassette interface at the back, a built-in speaker at the front, easy to follow manuals (by those days' standards), fancy design (ditto) and a brain-damaging price tag.

Initially, it showed all the signs of being a fiasco. A hugely expensive home computer being sold by the corporation that epitomised big business in America. Miraculously – and even senior IBM execs admit this – corporate America discovered the machine and bought it.

In those heady days the PC was considered a powerful beast – 64K of memory to run programs, two floppy disk drives capable of storing up to 160K of information, a separate, high resolution green screen, separate keyboard and most important of all, a number of empty slots inside into which could be plugged extra features such as memory expansions, printer and communications adaptors.

By the time the machine reached the UK, its spec had been boosted to include more memory and bigger disk drives but it was still fantastically expensive (around £3,500 for a 128K system with two floppy disk drives). These days, that kind of spec and price tag is unimaginable, and if you pay much more than £500 for a similarly specced system, I'd suggest that you've to yet to fully grasp the point of the capitalist system.

Anyway, the point of all this is that the PC has spent most of its life being so underpowered (rotten graphics, Minnie Mouse speaker) and overpriced, that no-one in their right minds could consider it as a games machine.

Until now.

Not only are there loads of games for the PC, but are also enough hardware add-ons with which to transform this pin-striped nasty into a King Hell games console with blazing graphics, stereo soundtracks, flight sticks, joysticks, joss sticks, Pink Floyd, tilt, mmmmn-ngghh crossed synapses. Games have a curious way of affecting the mind...

The important thing to remember is that it is possible to buy a machine that will double as business computer and fly a few F-16 missions by night. You just have to think a bit more carefully about what you're buying.

In the example set-ups, you'll see I've gone overboard in recommending the VGA graphics standard to anyone and everyone. That's not because there are thousands of games that take advantage of that standard (there aren't) – it's because it's the best mainstream business graphics standard available at the moment, and it runs all games written for the PC, even if it has to 'fake' a lower resolution.

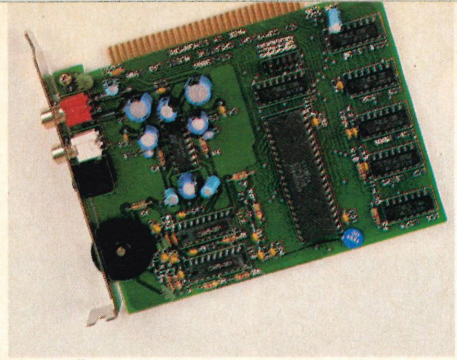
I'd also suggest that at well under £50, a mouse is not the luxury purchase it was even a couple of years ago. More and more business programs use one, while games are increasingly offering a choice between using a joystick and using a Microsoft-compatible mouse. Often the mouse is a better option.

THE BASE MACHINE

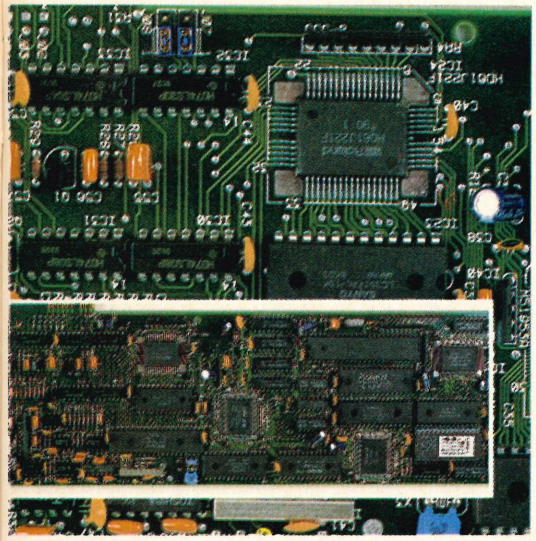
Why have we chosen a CompuAdd machine? Frankly because it was the only outfit which showed any interest in getting the box to me in time so I could meet the ferocious deadline imposed on me by an uncaring editor.

As it turned out, though, and after a few hiccups, we've done OK. The CompuAdd 810 is a budget XT-compatible with a sleepy 20Mb hard disk, single floppy disk drive, 640K of

"It would be hard to think of something that's got a more blue-suit, business image than an IBM Personal Computer – the machine that was born with a golden calculator in its mouth and a shine on its shoes."



►**Sound investments: the Game Blaster music board, and (below) Roland's incomparable LAPC-1 synthesiser card.**



memory, parallel port, two serial ports, games port(!) and an amber monochrome screen for £729.00. It's also brand new and comes with many 'extras' that companies like IBM usually make you pay for.

In our case what's most attractive is the built-in games port, the 30-day money back guarantee, and the price of a product which will happily double as a business computer when it's not being thrashed to within an inch of its life by the *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*.

If you think an XT-compatible is going to be too weedy, you can pick up decent AT-compatibles (slightly faster) for around a grand nowadays (check the adverts in this month's *What Personal Computer?* for hardware prices). And yes, if you have a 386 (vrooom!) the game will be slicker and you won't have to wait 45 seconds for it load – but faster games will probably be unplayable (Ocean's *Wizball*, for example, runs so fast on a 386 that you'd need the reactions of a cat to stay alive for more than a couple of seconds).

As in all things there are power freaks, but an XT or AT will suit most people and means you won't have to pledge the life of your first born to finance the deal.

If you check out the four main photos you'll get a full breakdown as to what we've added to the machine each time, where it came from and how much it cost.

THE GAMES WORLD

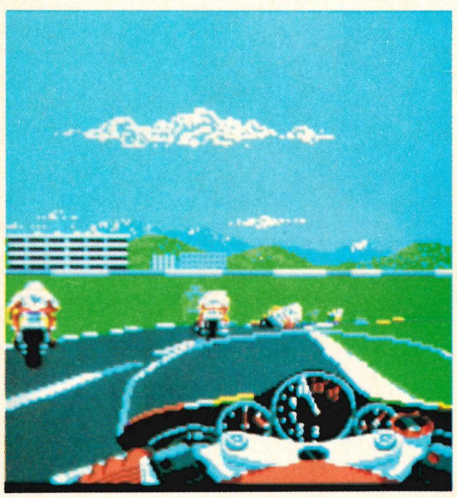
Forget the business world, this is the truly dangerous and evil place. If you thought *dBase* was difficult, wait 'til you get a load of *War In Middle Earth*, *Wasteland* or *Life & Death*. Someone somewhere (they all have names like Ubik, or the Bitmap Brothers) actually sits down and works these things out – though judging from some, they look like they were devised and then programmed between courses.

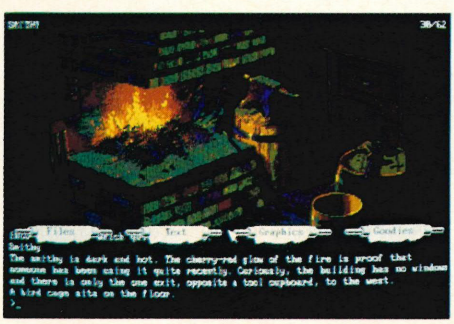
As things stand, you're likely to find that graphically, PC games look decidedly shabby compared to those blazing away on Junior's Amiga or ST. You'll also discover that many of the games come with nonsensical extra documentation – *Zork Zero*, for example, incorporates something called The Flathead Calendar, others come with maps embossed like tea cloths, trinkets and short stories that you have to read before you can start to play the game properly.

I'm told that this is all to do with creating a world in which inventive gamesplayers can explore. I believe it's actually to do with finding increasingly unlikely ways of getting Junior to part with his money.

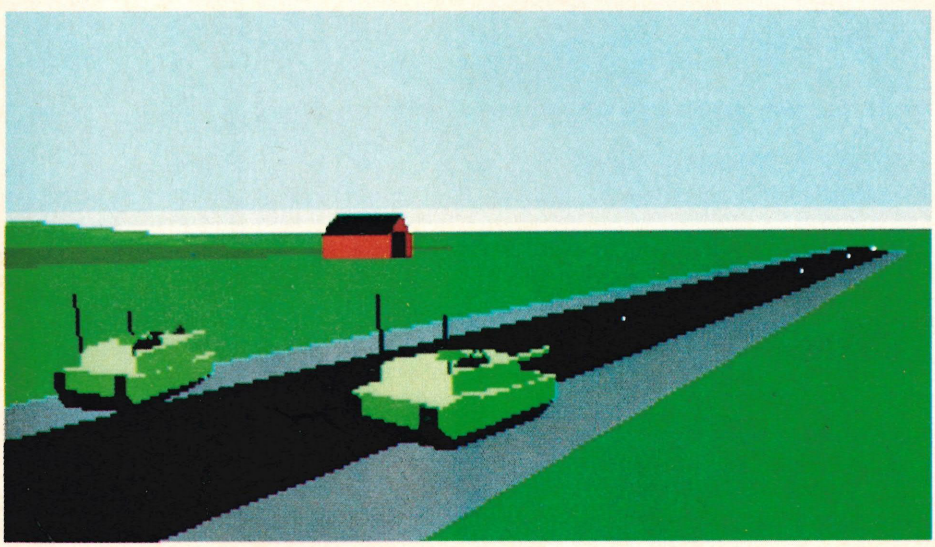
"The important thing to remember is that it is possible to buy a machine that will double as business computer and fly a few F-16 missions by night."

Those who've played before may be pleased to discover that many of the adventure games come with built in hints to help dunces increase their scores without doing any work. Shame on you. Those who haven't will probably be quietly appalled at the amount of energy and talent that gets poured into some of this stuff. Most of it yours.





►**The shape of PC gaming: (clockwise from above left) open throttles in Accolade's *The Cycles*, adventurous graphics in Magnetic Scrolls' *Fish* and *M1 – Tank Platoon* from Microprose.**



IN GENERAL

- Watch out for games based on films. Like novelisations they're usually rushed out to cash in on the movie's attendant publicity with the result that they're often crap.
- Games for PC-compatibles nearly always cost more than those that run on other machines (the Mac is the exception here, but then all Mac owners are slightly bonkers anyway). The reasoning here seems to be that anyone crazy enough to buy a PC must have more money than sense.
- Violence: and lots of it. *Wasteland* (a Mad Max-like graphics adventure) even has a warning printed on the front cover. Others like *Life & Death*, an operating room simulation, include plastic gloves, surgeon's mask, and are cheerfully sickening.
- Copy protection: it's quite common now for the cheaper games not to be protected at all – expensive ones are, and use varied and peculiar methods. Many will ask you to quote a word from the manual as a password before the game begins (seems a bit dumb to me, haven't they heard of photocopiers?).
- Front covers: always lurid – beautiful big-breasted women meet slab-chested men – CGA graphics make them all look like they're made of Weetabix so who cares?►

● Screen shots: most promotional material shows a few snazzy screen shots in order to convince you to buy the game. Some are honest enough to tell you which machine the screen shots were taken on, others aren't. Always remember that they're going to use the machine that flatters their product the best. Unfortunately, it may not be the machine you own.

● Complexity: many games are fiendishly complex involving riddles, mazes, alternative histories, maps, songs, chants, spells, dexterity tests that would defeat NASA astronauts, lateral thinking puzzles, and so on. This is good. Beware those that pack all sorts of extras (maps, books, little circly things that you twist) around a game — these are often designed to distract you from something that's as interesting as a cinema advert.

● Resuming. A neat trick this. For those of you who become hopelessly addicted ("I'm only doing *Fish* twice a day, I can handle it, it's not a problem") there are some you can take to work and play with during daylight hours. These feature a resume mode which — at the touch of a couple of keys — drops you out into a fake spreadsheet. Next time you press a key, you disappear back into the game. Just make sure it's you who presses the key and not some interfering so-and-so from accounts.

THE COLOUR OF MONEY

Despite the fact that every so-called graphics standard has a wealth of information associated with it (pixels, dot resolution, 43 line modes, 132 column modes, scan rates and so on) there's very little you actually need to know.

And here it is...

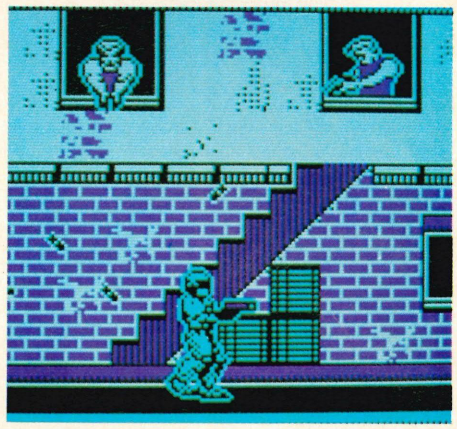
All of the graphics standards mentioned here (apart from Hercules) were invented by IBM. All of them need two things: a bit of electronics to send a signal, and a monitor at the other end to receive and display it. Mostly, the bit that does the work comes on a card which plugs into an expansion slot (although more modern machines sometimes have this built into the main system board).

ABBREVIATIONS

CGA – Crap Graphics Adaptor
EGA – Enhanced Graphics Adaptor
VGA – Video Graphics Array

►Colour variations: stunning EGA in *F-15 Strike Eagle*, while *RoboCop* wallows in basic four-colour CGA (above right).

Card	Display	What it shows
Mono	Mono	Text, unspeakable 'graphics'
Hercules	Mono	Text, good mono graphics (only works with some software like Flight Simulator)
CGA	Colour	Awful colour graphics. Sludgy mauves and reds.
EGA	Enhanced Colour	Much better, clearer colour graphics. Up to 16 colours
VGA	VGA Colour	Best mainstream PC colour display. Up to 64 colours, clear text.



THE REALLY TECHIE BIT

And now, in graphic detail...

● Monochrome: only used for straight text games. Any 'graphics-based' games for this screen will make your average four year-old's efforts look like Picasso. On second thoughts, they probably already paint like Picasso — bad analogy.

● Hercules: lets you run some graphics software on a monochrome screen. Software (like *Flight Simulator*) needs to have been specially adapted to allow the hardware to reproduce colours as shades of green or amber. Used to be a good bet, but now only for those dedicated to FS or on a fantastically tight budget.

● CGA: simply ignore it, everybody else does — actually, that's not true. As an aside, and to demonstrate the ridiculous lengths that some manufacturers will go to grab a share of the limelight, Hitachi has just launched the world's first colour lap-top computer featuring, yes... a CGA screen. A 1989 computer featuring 1983 display technology. Brilliant.

● EGA: announced in Summer '84, this has been a good stand-by. Much better than its predecessor, EGA is suitable for running nearly all PC games. Not bad for business software too, but remember — for around an extra 100 you can have...

● VGA: launched alongside the PS/2 range in '87, this is the mainstream 'state of the art' display standard. More colours and a sharper text reproduction make this comfortable to work with, and great to relax with.

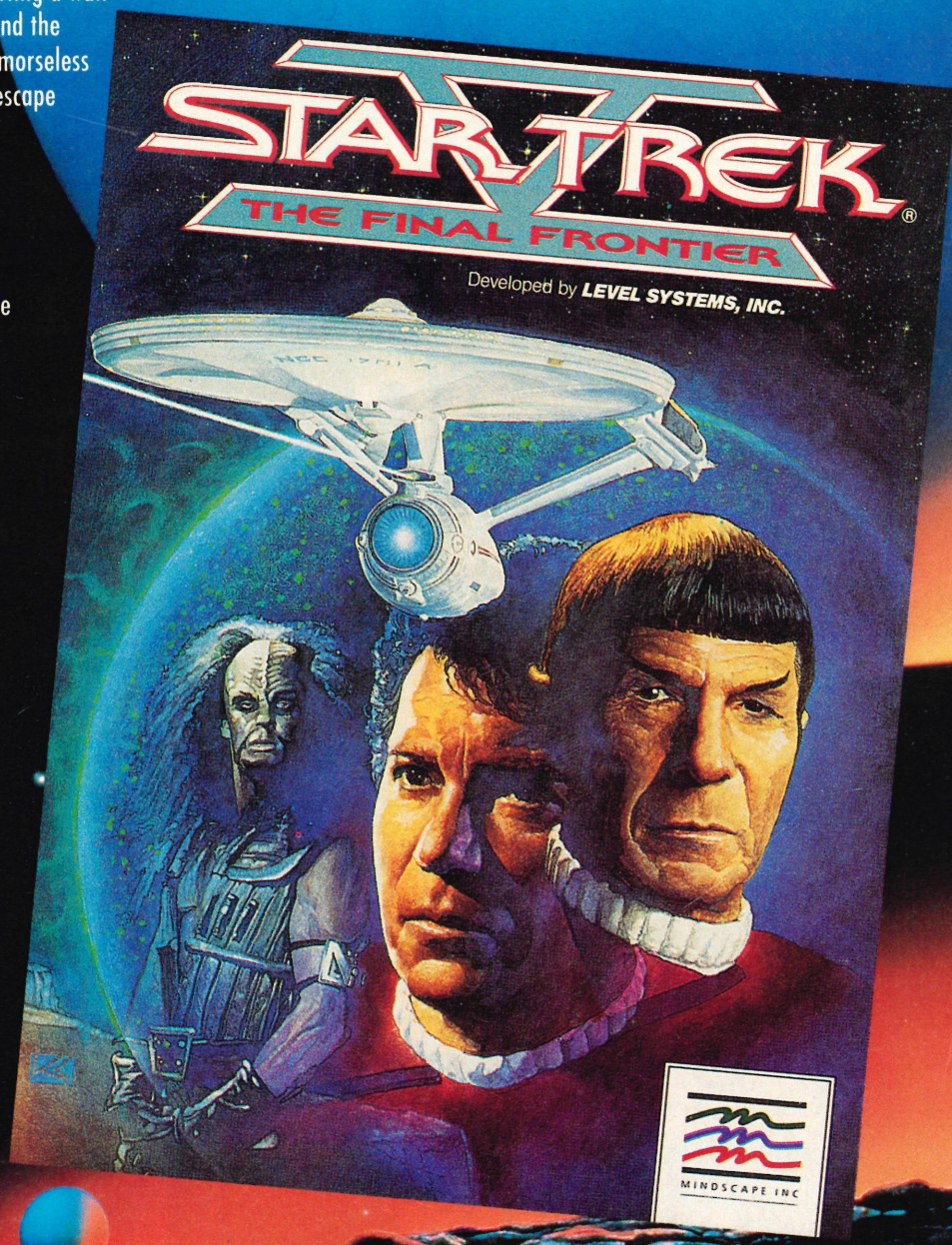
MIRACLE MAKERS

At last they got something right. The best thing about EGA is that it also has a special CGA mode so that you can run any funny old games you might have from way back when (*Crossfire*, for example, that classic from Sierra On-Line). VGA has two special modes which allow you to run both CGA and EGA programs, so in other words, if you upgrade, you can still take all your old software (business and games) with you. This is particularly useful since many games manufacturers insist on writing programs that only work on the lowest common denominator (the aforementioned horror, CGA). As the market gathers force more and more will produce products specifically designed to take advantage of the higher definition and better colours provided by EGA and VGA setups — like the excellent *F-15 Strike Eagle II* from MicroProse.

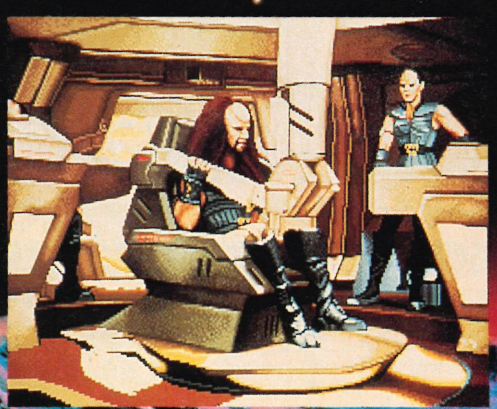
You are Captain Kirk!

You are Captain T Kirk, the Enterprise is yours and your mission is to drop off three intergalactic ambassadors on a safe planet, without starting a war. You can interact freely with your crew - Spock, Scotty and the usual team are there, but you are pitted against the remorseless aggression of Klaa and the Klingons, and you have to escape from the deadly Barrier Zone.

The revolutionary graphics create the most realistic game ever. The play of Star Trek V changes to suit the challenge at hand. The strategy and action is your responsibility. Not only do you have to deal with outside forces, but all is not well within the Starship. Just how good a Captain are you?



Actual IBM screen



Available for Amiga, Macintosh, IBM, Tandy and compatibles.

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Mindscape International Limited, PO Box 1019, Lewes, East Sussex BN8 4DW. Tel. (044 486) 545/547.

THE LADA

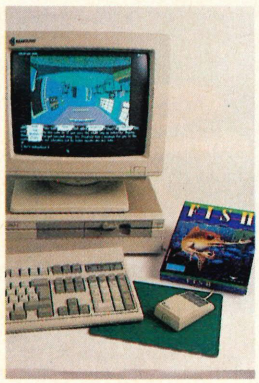
CompuAdd 810 with 640K of memory, 20Mb hard disk, 360K floppy disk drive, monochrome monitor, two parallel ports, one serial port, one games port, keyboard.
System: £729
Software: Flight Simulator: £45
Total Cost: £774

Nothing fancy here at all – just the plain machine running Microsoft's Flight Simulator, one of the great grand-daddies of the PC games world. One of the reasons that Flight Simulator caught on so quickly was that Microsoft wrote a set of drivers for it that made it work with a Hercules card (see box on display standards) which meant you could play it on a bog-standard machine – the game doesn't even need a mouse, though it's better with one. There were some graphics games for ordinary mono screens (Asylum is one particularly gruesome example, thankfully no longer available) but they were generally rubbish, and if you're thinking of serious graphics outside Flight Simulator, you ought to get a colour screen. If you're of a more intellectual bent, there are some excellent text-based adventure games for the PC: Microsoft Adventure, Zork I, II, III, Hitch-hiker's Guide To The Galaxy are among the oldest and still the best. Magnetic Scrolls' games of this kind are also hot – but they use high quality graphics and you'll need at least an EGA screen to run them. Sierra games are also good and only require CGA/EGA.

THE FORD ESCORT

CompuAdd 810 with 640K of memory, 20Mb hard disk, 360K floppy disk drive, EGA graphics card and monitor, two parallel ports, one serial port, one games port, keyboard, Genius mouse.
System price: £1,029
Genius mouse: £39
Fish: £24.95
Total Cost: £1,092.95

Here the stakes are slightly higher. We've switched out the Hercules-compatible monochrome graphics card and screen and replaced it with a 14" EGA colour display and an EGA graphics card (bought separately from CompuAdd, this adds £409 to the bill,



but you can always shop around). We've also added a Genius serial mouse (£39) to better play the game. The jump from monochrome straight to EGA is easily explained. At its best, CGA (the intervening 'standard') was an awful piece of technology which managed to scrape together only a few poor colours and sling them on the screen at such a low resolution that you'd have been better off (indeed, were better off) running a Sinclair Spectrum off a TV set. Nowadays, few manufacturers even bother to offer it as an option. Anyone who sells a business computer these days which has CGA graphics is shifting old stock, and you shouldn't go near them. And as far as business goes, we only include EGA here for those who've already got it, or who are on a very restricted budget. As you'll see from the next set-up, an extra £100 gets you VGA graphics in all their glory.

THE PEUGEOT 205 GTI

CompuAdd 810 with 640K of memory, 20Mb hard disk, 360K floppy disk drive, VGA graphics card and monitor, two parallel ports, one serial port, one games port, keyboard, CompuAdd joystick, CMS Game Blaster Music Board.
System price: £1,159
Joystick: £15
Game Blaster: £119
F-15 Strike Eagle II: £34.95
Total Cost: £1,327.95

We've begun to move up-market. The mouse has been replaced by a cheap CompuAdd joystick (£15), and the screen has been upgraded to VGA quality by adding a card and the appropriate monitor. Note that installing a new graphics adaptor into any computer will probably involve changing a few of the machine's internal switches. If you don't do this, it won't understand that you've put in a new option, and it won't work. It's a pain in the posterior, but if you follow the machine's manual closely you should get by. None of the additions we've made thus far has been able to do anything about the pitiful quality of the PC's internal speaker (or squeaker, as it's known). Now's the time to address that problem. This configuration incorporates a Game Blaster PC Music Board which plugs into one of the free expansion slots and allows you to feed the audio signal out through a couple of phono jacks into a stereo system. It's capable of playing up to 12 different sounds (voices) at once. It worked fine on the manufacturer's demo, but I experienced serious problems getting it to work properly with Sierra's Silpheed.

THE PORSCHE 944

CompuAdd 810 with 640K of memory, 20Mb hard disk, 360K floppy disk drive, VGA graphics card and monitor, two parallel ports, one serial port, one games port, keyboard, LAPC-1 card, Flight Stick – your own stereo.
System price: £1,174
LAPC-1 sound card: £379
Flight Stick: £59.95
Space Quest III: £34.99
Total Cost: £1647.94

The big one. Hidden in here is a Roland LAPC-1 L.A. Sound Card – I should actually say jammed in here because the card itself has got so many bits sticking out of it that I had to remove one of the CompuAdd's thoughtfully placed guide runners before I could squeeze it inside. That meant the end that wasn't secured firmly at the back with a little Philips screw was left wobbling dangerously. At least (and unlike Game Blaster) there's no software to screw about with. All you do is load in a game that's been written to work with the card and away you go. So far, Roland's done a deal with Sierra for four games – Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking For Love, Police Quest II, Kings Quest IV, and Space Quest III (by the way, the soundtrack for the latter was written by Supertramp's drummer, Bob Siebenerg – far out!). Basically, the Roland add-on is a synthesiser on a circuit board which is capable of playing up to 32 different instruments simultaneously. This, my friends, makes a hell of a racket. However, as used in Kings Quest IV for example, it's rather sweet. Like Game Blaster, it's got two phono-style outputs which can plug straight into the 'line in' sockets on your average ghetto blaster (or better – the choice is yours). The sounds are excellent – rich, varied and loud! That's really all you need to know about the sound card in this context. Also in the picture, but not actually being used in this demo, is the rather lovely Flight Stick (available from Software Circus) – a little pricey, but excellent for flight simulators.

THE WAY AHEAD

The future for combining sound, graphics and animation in games software looks incredible — and it's not just happening in the ST and Amiga markets. Of all the devices here, the Roland LAPC-1 card (or something like it) looks most set to play a significant part in the future of the games industry. Elsewhere I've discussed the way that Roland has added soundtracks to well known games from Sierra, but it doesn't stop there. Roland has also provided a way to link the LAPC-1 board to an external musical keyboard via the standard Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI). It's called the MCB-1 and costs £79.

In this way, using a cheap MIDI keyboard you can play with all of the sounds on the card, and use them to arrange, play and record music. From there it's not far to imagine a gaming world where the musicians among you could write your own soundtracks and append them to the games (there's a parallel in business — soundtracks to demonstrations and presentations, programs like AutoDesk Animator point the way to this revolution). After that, who knows? You could sample your own voice and add your own interjections to your favourite game, or even replace the character's voice with your own.

This technology is pretty new, and while it's initially very impressive, the appeal begins to pall after a while — rather like any good graphics intro when you're forced to sit through it for the tenth time. And as yet, there's no fast forward button on these things. However, once games manufacturers start to provide 'hooks' into their games that allow users to tailor them (add dialogue, soundtracks, special effects and so on) then the whole MIDI sound module market is going to explode. Brown Waugh Publishing (which makes the Game Blaster board) is already talking about the Killer Kard which will offer voice synthesis, voice digitisation, MIDI interface, and stereo sound for under £200.

►**PC gaming for beginners: Dynamics Marketing's *Home Games Starter Pack*.**

ALL TOGETHER NOW

Those who wish to dip a toe in the water before taking the plunge may like to begin with a do-it-yourself kit which presents enough to get you on the road to gaming heaven in a single box. For £49.95, Dynamics Marketing's Home Games Starter Pack includes the company's own A-D Games Card (which converts the standard IBM analogue signal to a more standard digital form, allowing conventional joysticks to be used), a Competition Pro PC Joystick and four Ocean games: *RoboCop*, *Wizball*, *Victory Road* and *World Series Baseball*. Although this selection doesn't take graphics into account, it is a good building block — especially as the games card allows the use of two joysticks (two player games are generally more enjoyable than their solo counterparts).

NOTICE BOARD

CompuAdd: (0272) 637488
Roland (UK): (01) 568 1247
Microsoft (Flight Simulator): (0734) 500741
Magnetic Scrolls (Fish): (01) 403 4268
Data Liberation (Game Blaster): (0983) 864674
Dynamics Marketing (starter pack): (061) 626 7222
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Europe may be opening for business – but if you can't talk the talk, you won't walk the walk. Pete Connor looks at the Kosmos range of language tutors to see if they can do as much for European relations as the Chunnel.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

What with the coming of 1992 and all that, there's been an upsurge of interest in foreign language learning. However, the conclusion reached by just about everyone with an opinion to air is that the British are lousy at picking up foreign languages – largely because we're insular, lazy, arrogant and badly served by the educational establishment. If this is true, then anything that can make language learning less of a chore – that might go so far as to make it enjoyable – should be welcomed.

These four programs from Kosmos are an attempt to do just that with regard to learning the vocabulary of foreign languages, the idea being that the interactive element of the software lessens the tedium and reinforces the message. Each program consists of 32 lessons, comprising in total around 2,500 different vocabulary or grammatical items.

Lessons are divided into categories such as The Family, Clothes, The Weather, Parts Of The Body, Prepositions, Adjectives, Conjunctions and so on. The range covered makes the programs suitable for GCSE students and also for those coming to a language later in life.

Anyone beyond GCSE level really ought to know all of this stuff, but if – like most people – you just want to know the word for 'tree' rather than 'giant redwood', 'holm oak', 'silver birch' and all the rest, you should be OK.

And the level of vocabulary necessary isn't that high – experts tell us that you can hold a perfectly civilised conversion(ette) with a basic vocabulary of 1,000 words or less (just think how few different words you use in English on a day to day basis).

The programs obviously contain different vocabulary items, but all use exactly the same user interface and learning 'engine'. They can all be run from either a floppy or hard drive (there's no copy protection), but if you plan to use one regularly, installation on hard disk will make things a lot quicker.

"Anything that can make language learning less of a chore – that might go so far as to make it enjoyable – should be welcomed."

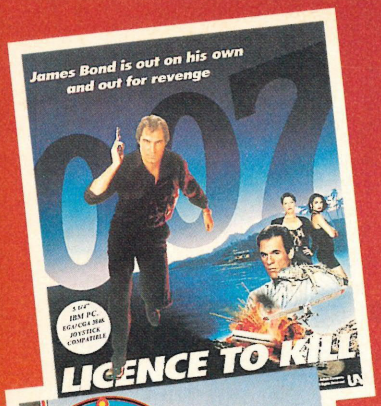
The proceedings begin with a top-level menu, from which you can choose to see the instructions on-screen, list the available lessons, load a lesson, create a new lesson or exit to DOS.

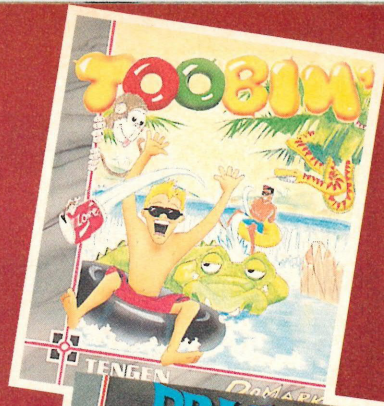
The display is clear (whether in colour or mono) and the controls are easy to use; simply use the cursor keys to highlight your choice and press Return.

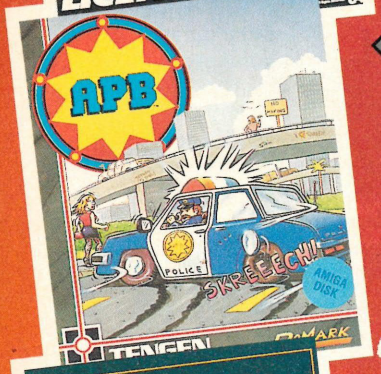
It's only when you've done this that you come up against the first, and most persistently annoying feature of this software: you are told which drive you are logged onto and then asked whether you wish to amend it. Once would be reasonable, just to make sure you're on the drive where the program is, but the same sequence is repeated every time you make a choice from this menu – very tedious indeed.

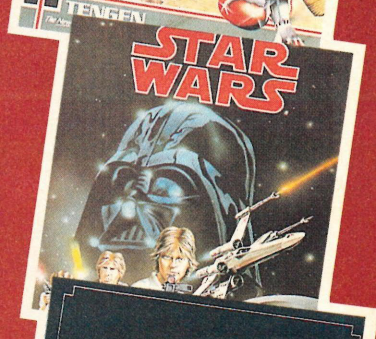
Once you've decided which lesson you fancy you load it into the 'lesson store', a box telling you which lesson you have chosen and the number of entries it contains. At this point you can choose either a 'self-teach session' or

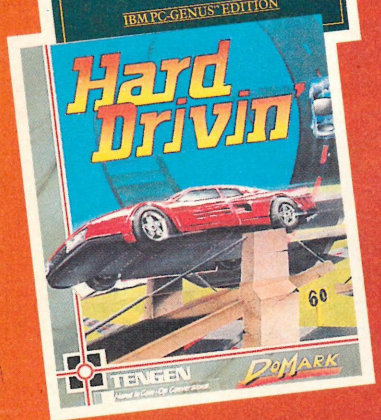
MEGA HITS FOR MEGA HERTZ

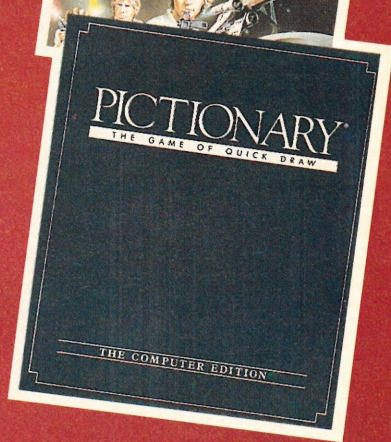












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Dragon Spirit	C/E/H/T	☐ C/E/H/T	☐ £24.99
APB	C/E/H/T	☐ C/E/H/T	☐ £24.99
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DOMARK

a 'self-test session' (more of these in a moment). You don't have to do the whole lesson, but can choose, for example, from Entry 10 to Entry 35.

You can choose to display entries either sequentially or at random, and after this are given the choice of (taking The French Mistress as example) French only, English only, French then English or English then French. You can also choose an automatic or single-step display. In the former you select a period, such as five seconds, during which items are displayed and then replaced by the next one. With single-step you simply press the space bar to move on to the next item.

"Answers have to be entered in the order that the Mistress expects . . . this is not simply annoying, but an inadequacy of the system that could lead beginners into error."

► **A slightly distasteful aspect of the Kosmos range is the use of crass national stereotypes in the title and packaging, doubtless to enhance the software's 'fun' aspect.**

The two alternatives of self-teach and self-test are what the software is about: in the first you learn vocabulary, in the second you test yourself on it. In the first, words or phrases are shown on screen, followed by their translation — there isn't much flexibility, apart from the length of time you choose to leave the display on screen.

Self-teach is where you actually have to do some work, translating from or into different languages. The item is displayed, and you have to type in the correct translation. If you make a mistake you get a warning beep, and you can get help, in the form of the next letter, by hitting the DEL key. A running accuracy percentage is displayed at the bottom of the screen, and at the end of the test you get a results display telling you how many entries you attempted, number of mistakes, percentage accuracy and so on.

This is alright as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. In a simple vocabulary test such as this you would expect the program to be able to handle synonyms. Tout fait, for example, can mean 'totally' or 'completely' or 'quite' or 'entirely' or a number of similar things depending on the context in which you find it. Fair enough, you wouldn't expect a language program to allow a dozen synonyms as correct translations, or to bother itself with contexts, but that strict French Mistress will only let you have two synonyms for tout fait — 'completely' and 'quite'. What's even worse is that answers have to entered in the order that the Mistress expects — if you type 'quite' first you'll get the warning beep. Exactly the same thing happens with enfin, meaning 'at last' or 'finally'; type the second of these in first and you'll be told you're wrong. This is not simply annoying, but an inadequacy of the system that could lead beginners into error.

Such examples are symptomatic of the software's lack of depth. Why should learning vocabulary be limited to simple translations of single words or short phrases? On its own a new word is hard to remember; only using it will transform it from an passive to an active item in your vocabulary — that is, one you can actually use rather than merely recognise.

A very simple way of achieving this would be to provide sample sentences showing usage, or sentences where you have to fill in the missing word selected from the ones in the lesson you have just done, or even multiple choice sentence-questions; none of these are featured in any of the programs under review.

It's not a problem of disk space; there is a good 150K free, which could surely have been used for more varied exercises or for a larger vocabulary — 2,500 words doesn't seem very much. Indeed, the software offers you the option of creating your own lessons by typing in your own lists of words.

You may think that £19.95 is rather a lot of money to shell out for a glorified vocabulary list of only 2,500 words and phrases. It's a fair point, and you ought to consider whether your needs might not be better served by that old-fashioned medium, the book. Remember that books are relatively cheap, can contain a lot of words and are portable.

However, there is something to be said for doing the duller parts of language-learning in this interactive way. Some people may well find that the process is enlivened by the tests and accuracy reports, which could appeal to schoolchildren resistant to the hard slog of acquiring a foreign vocabulary.

The idea behind the Kosmos tutor series is basically sound, but it needs to to be implemented in a more thorough and palatable way to be entirely successful.

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1) How did you get to read *PC Leisure?*

You buy *What PC* anyway ☐
You bought *What PC* for *PC Leisure* ☐
You were given *PC Leisure* by a friend ☐
Other:

.....

2) How many other people have read your copy of *PC Leisure?*

.....

3) On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the following aspects of *PC Leisure.*

Turning your PC into an entertainment system ☐
Public Domain Software/Shareware ☐
Language Software ☐
Educational Software ☐
Driving Round-Up ☐
Games Reviews ☐
Sierra Feature ☐
Advertisements ☐

4) On a scale of 1 to 5, what did you think of *PC Leisure* overall?

.....

5) What other topics would you have liked to have seen covered in *PC Leisure?*

News ☐
Previews ☐
Games playing advice ☐
Graphics ☐
Sound ☐
Other:

.....

PERSONAL

6) Are you ... Male? ☐ Female? ☐

7) And your age?

.....

8) What is your occupation?

Managing Director ☐
Own Business ☐
Programmer ☐
Systems Analyst ☐
Other:

.....

9) What make of PC do you use?

Amstrad ☐
Compaq ☐
IBM ☐
Olivetti ☐
Tandon ☐
Other:

.....

10) What type of PC do you use?

Portable ☐
XT ☐
286 ☐
386 ☐

11) And where do you use your PC most for leisure?

Home ☐
Work ☐
Other:

.....

12) How much time, on average, do you spend on the following activities each week?

	0hr	-1hr	1-3hrs	4-6hrs	+7hrs
Business	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Family/Educational	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Music	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Graphics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other Leisure Activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13) On scale of 1 to 5, how would rate your knowledge and use of computers?

.....

14) Which of the following peripherals do you own or intend to buy?

	OWN	INTEND TO BUY
Joystick	☐	☐
Mouse	☐	☐
CGA Graphics Adaptor	☐	☐
EGA Graphics Adaptor	☐	☐
VGA Graphics Adaptor	☐	☐
Music Board	☐	☐
Modem	☐	☐

15) On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your enjoyment of the following types of games.

Arcade ☐
Role-Playing/Fantasy ☐
Simulation ☐
Sports ☐
Strategy ☐

16) What other computer magazines do you read?

ACE ☐
Computer + Video Games ☐
Computer Shopper ☐
The Games Machine ☐
The One ☐
PC Plus ☐
PC User ☐
Personal Computer World ☐
What PC? ☐
Which PC? ☐
Which Computer? ☐

Other:

.....

17) Would you be interested in buying a PC games magazine on a regular basis?

Yes ☐
No ☐

18) Who else uses your PC for leisure activities?

Friend ☐
Colleague ☐
Offspring ☐
Other Half ☐

19) How much, on average, are you likely to spend on PC leisure product per month?

.....

20) Where do you normally buy your games?

High Street Chain Store ☐
Specialist Computer Shop ☐
Mail Order ☐
Direct From Manufacturer ☐
Other:

.....

21) What has prevented you from purchasing PC games?

Price ☐
Availability ☐
Awareness ☐
Other:

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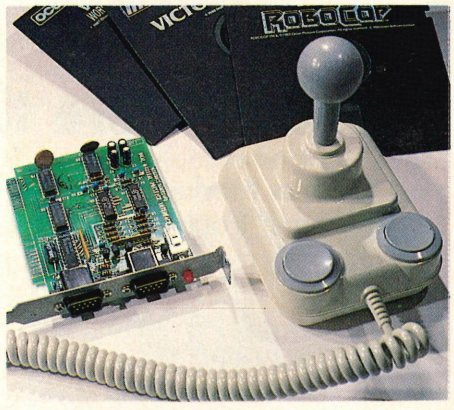

Name .....

Address .....

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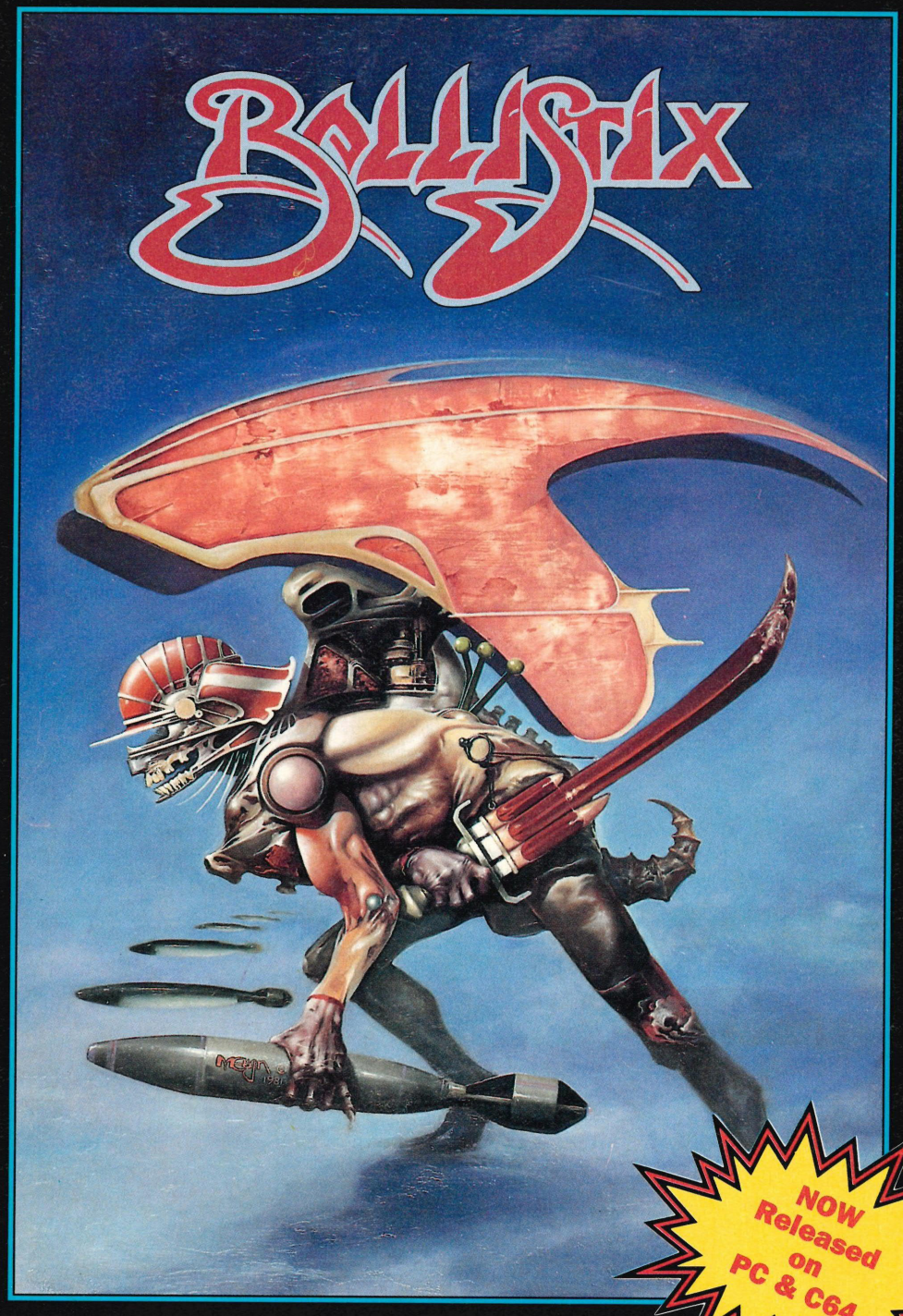
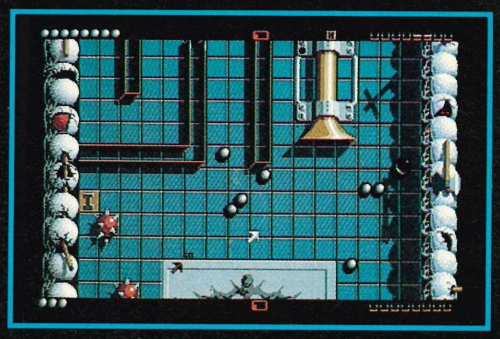
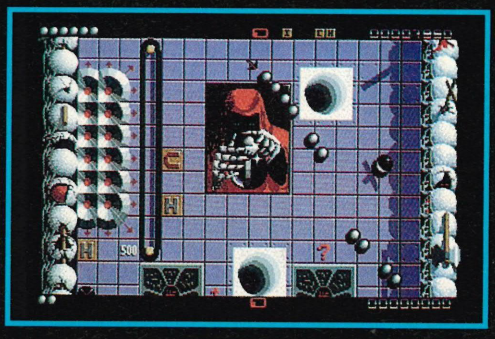
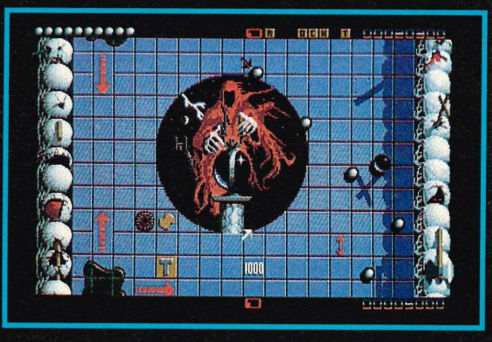
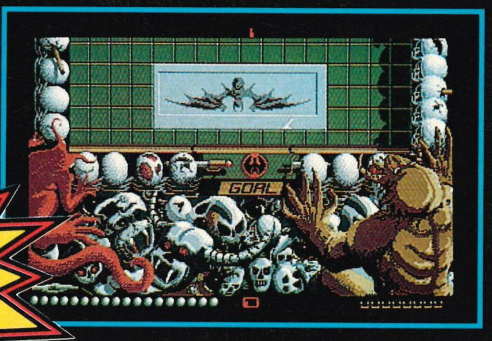
BALLISTIX











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Screen Shots taken from the Amiga version

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PSYGNOSIS

There's no such thing as a free lunch . . . but there is free software available to those who know where to look. Robert Browning gets involved in the free-for-all.

IT'S RAINING

As everyone knows, nothing that's worth having comes free — but like every rule, this one has an exception. Public Domain software, probably the last retreat of the 'something for nothing' brigade, is as misunderstood as it is rich in innovative and interesting software.

But just how has this mass of software come to be openly available? The answer is easily understood if your enjoyment of computers is derived more from fiddling inside the beasts than simply using them as entertainment devices or workstations.

In the early days of computing, technology buffs were few and far between. The pioneers who explored the secrets of machine code and assembly language programming were only too eager to share what they had learned with others, in the hope that freedom of information would lead to even greater understanding.

Most of this almost Utopian cooperation originally took place in America, but The Land Of The Free is a very big place and the early computer buffs found that the easiest way of swapping information, programs, secrets and utilities, was by linking computers via the public phone network. Indeed some computers were dedicated to this task alone — bulletin boards — computers which were linked by modems, devices for converting computer signals into sound signals which could be passed over the phone lines.

The bulletin board operators (Sysops) simply allowed all comers to call up their computer and leave messages or software — almost like a digital answering machine. If a programmer had written something of which he was particularly proud, he 'downloaded' it to a bulletin board and invited other users to take a copy and play with it. Feedback from other programmers was useful for improving the program — in many cases they would actually alter the program itself before passing it back to the author for comments.

"The network of bulletin boards (now the computer buff's public domain) was a means of exhibiting work, just as an art gallery is to a painter or sculptor."

Soon the telephone lines were buzzing with more than just idle banter and high-powered business chat. Almost without anyone noticing, a sophisticated network of bulletin boards had sprung up in the States which allowed any program to be distributed across the nation within days of its release.

This network served as a superb forum for programmers who often had little commercial interest in their work. To them, the network of bulletin boards (now the computer buff's public domain) was a means of exhibiting work, just as an art gallery is to a painter or sculptor.

The new-found freedom allowed the range of available software to grow, eventually covering just about every aspect of life. For example, a professor who had an interest in computers and astrology might write a star-mapping program for any other computer user to benefit. Likewise, software appeared covering subjects such as communications, education, religion, mathematics, the stock market . . . in fact, if you could name it, the Public Domain probably had a program for it.

AT LEAST IT'S OVER HERE

As always, what happened Stateside eventually happened here. In fact, the idea of phone-a-program grew so fast that the UK now enjoys what's probably the most sophisticated network of bulletin boards outside of the USA. This is especially amazing when you consider that using a phone in the UK is vastly more expensive than it is in America, where local calls are free and digital switching exchanges are a thing of the present — not the future.

Nevertheless, thanks to the tireless work of the many UK Sysops, just about every PD program ever released in the States is available to UK users. Naturally because the scene is dominated by the Americans, the software is geared towards the computers that are popular over there. While you can find PD software for essentially English computers, such as the BBC and Sinclair QL, the titles number in the hundreds rather than in thousands as they do for computers like Ataris, Amigas, Apples and, of course, PC-compatibles.

But the PD scene has changed vastly over the years, a change largely brought about by the ever-growing number of passive computer users — users who don't contribute to the Public Domain as much as they consume its wares. The most significant change is the onset of Shareware.

Although Shareware is distributed through the same highly-effective network of bulletin boards, it isn't free in the same way as its PD cousin. The difference is that if you acquire a Shareware product you have to pay for it — but only when you decide that it is useful and that you will make use of it.

Once you have paid you should find your name put on the author's mailing list and you should get regular software updates as and when they become available. This doesn't always happen. In most cases you should also be sent a printed and full-blown version of the software's documentation. Once again, this doesn't always happen. In addition, most Shareware authors offer some sort of technical support scheme so that users with problems can get a quick solution. Guess what? This doesn't always happen either.

The advantage of this scheme to programmers is that they stand a chance of getting some financial reward, particularly if their program is genuinely good — a reward that might otherwise have escaped them if the poor chaps had been expected to rely on the traditional methods of marketing software which involve a great deal of money for packaging and advertising. The level of investment required on the commercial scene hardly justifies the risk with so many programs already fighting such a confused and reserved audience.

Users benefit from the Shareware scheme because they can try products before they have to make a commitment — and often Shareware programs can break new ground, simply because they do not have to conform to the traditional conservative standards demanded of expensive commercial products.

We poor British probably shouldn't expect as much from Shareware as the Americans, after all the vast majority of it was written by them for them. And while we are every bit as honest when it comes to paying for the stuff, it's often more expensive in bank charges and the like to send the money to the States than the software justifies, particularly when you consider that to take advantage of services such as free hot-line support we have the additional burden of transatlantic phone charges as well.

There are some UK-based agencies which undertake to provide everything for certain products, for a cut of the take. But they aren't all impartial by any means, and there are always some products that we miss out on.

In America, Shareware has proved, for a few, to be a very rewarding marketing technique. It isn't quite the same game as when Jim Button made the concept work. Certainly the growing abundance of programs has reduced the income of individuals and made users a touch more blasé about actually paying for the stuff. It's quite common these days to find software which is 'brain damaged' in some way (not completely functional but still capable of full evaluation — this is a crude attempt to achieve maximum returns for efforts).

Neither Public Domain software nor Shareware are really designed with the first-time computer user in mind. Pity really because one of the best ways to learn about a

computer, and all of the tasks it can be put to, is to play with masses of different software — without having to spend a fortune.

The software tends to be a bit rough around the edges, with none of the gloss found with commercial software. And of course you don't get masses of documentation either, you have to print out the often scant text files which come with the program. Many computer novices find this task alone a bit too much to handle.

But this looks too far ahead of PD software and what it does provide. For the computer hobbyist, the Public Domain is rich in interesting and diverse software which helps expand a user's understanding of computers in a very short time.

So as long as you are prepared to put in a bit of effort initially, you will almost certainly come to regard exploring the Public Domain as a hobby in its own right — certainly you'll find that the range of subjects covered will coincide with other interests, or even start you off on new hobbies.

The Public Domain is a rich source of entertainment for any computer user, but PC-compatible owners find themselves particularly spoiled for choice. Apart from 'pure' computer subjects like programming languages and utilities, you'll also find plenty of software covering typical business applications such as accounting and word-processing (including many utilities designed to enhance the use of commercial packages like *dBase* and *Wordstar*).

Games-players shouldn't expect too much from PD software, as not many offerings match the sophistication of their commercial counterparts (if they could, they'd more than likely be on sale with the rest of them). Perhaps the strongest and best PD games are text adventures and computer versions of old favourites like *Mah-Jong* and *Backgammon*.

For arcade enthusiasts, there's a fine version of good old *BreakOut* going under the name of *Dragon*, while other good PD arcade games include *Flightmare*, *Spacewar*, *Pitfall* and *Lazer Wars* (which is a little like the 'discs of death' sequence in Bally's arcade game *Tron*, based on the Disney space fantasy movie).

"Shareware programs can break new ground, simply because they do not have to conform to the traditional conservative standards demanded of expensive commercial products."

The bulk of these are designed to use CGA monitors, but the ever-increasing popularity of the EGA standard has led to a mushrooming of better quality games utilising the more colourful screens. At present there are perhaps just 50 or so available, but these include colourful versions of *BreakOut*, *Star Trek* and *Tron*. ▶

► **Available from most good bulletin boards and PD libraries, *Captain Comic* is a neat arcade adventure where you take the eponymous hero in a quest for three hidden treasures while fending off monsters and sundry beings. It's by no means a classic in terms of gameplay, but it does at least make the effort by using EA graphics.**

Strategy games are big on the PD scene: *War On The Sea* is a near-realistic simulation of WWII naval battles, while another, *Frigate*, puts you in command of a fleet which must destroy the Soviet fleet before it destroys yours – not very topical perhaps. *Business Strategist*, however, shouldn't offend anyone, as it involves making the day-to-day decisions necessary to rescue an old established company from the verge of bankruptcy.

Stock is a more of a simulation game than pure strategy based on Stock Exchange happenings – now that's topical. Other simulations include *Dulles Tower Air Traffic Control* (which offers five levels of difficulty and requires a good deal of practice before you can expect to fully understand the radar system showing 727's mixed in with Cessna's, never mind actually getting them down), and a *Ford Motor Company* driving simulation which allows you to test drive 16 of its models – just so long as you don't mind the steering wheel being on wrong side and driving cars the size of aircraft carrier decks. For card game freaks there are any number of simulations for the likes of *Cribbage*, *Bridge*, *Poker*, *Craps* or *Roulette*.

"One of the best ways to learn about a computer, and all of the tasks it can be put to, is to play with masses of different software – without having to spend a fortune . . ."

Traditionally the Public Domain was regarded as the birthplace of adventure games – the classic *Colossal Cave* is available in a revised format, together with other titles such as *Beyond the Titanic* and *Troll*. There are quite a few adventure game tool kits to help you write your own classic, too.

And this is just a very brief sample: there must be thousands of games in the libraries – everything from paper plane constructor kits to a large collection of 'adult-only' games (which are somewhat less restricted than the commercial offerings).

But the ardent leisure-seeker has more to enjoy than just games. Perhaps you fancy a little star-gazing and future-telling, in which case there's a range of titles covering every aspect of the science, from *Tarot*, a card reading program, to *Astrol 95* which covers just about every aspect of astrology and palm reading – including the creation of siderial charts.

If you include religion among your interests then there are hundreds of titles to choose from, including some really hard-disk-hungry works which are capable of finding any specified passage or phrase in the bible. Or how about exploring your family history by making use of the knowledge tied up in programs like *Family History* or *Family Ties*? These are designed to help you accumulate the necessary information and present it in a useable form. *Pedigree* does something similar for horses, or dogs at a push.

PC-compatibles aren't very strong on the sound front, but the public domain does offer sonic software ranging from simple music trivia tests and composition programs to powerful control software for the Roland MIDI systems.

Other hobbies catered for include horse racing, photography, keep fit, electronics, fishing, films, videos, bowling, gardening and even origami for those who fancy a dabble in paper folding.

MONEY MATTERS

Even after this brief list of the available goodies it should be clear that using the Public Domain is an absorbing way to spend computer time. But just how do you go about getting at this software? There are a number of choices and your approach will very much depend on the amount of money you can spend because, sadly, while PD software is supposed to be free, you shouldn't object to paying a reasonable copying and handling fee. Someone has to pay for the distribution, but there is an ever–growing trend for people to profit from from the Public Domain – so watch out.

The traditional method, and possibly one of the cheapest, is for you to equip yourself with a modem and some decent communications software and then link up to a few bulletin boards.

But in view of the complexities of computer communications (not to mention the expense of adding a properly located phone socket and buying a modem) many people will have to turn to PD libraries. These can be tracked down by looking for the adverts in magazines – but beware of these libraries since their very adverts betray commercial aspirations and (probably) corresponding charges. There are plenty of private groups in existance, but these may not be so readily found by advertising (to start your quest, we've provided a few contact numbers at the end of this feature). Most PD libraries use their own cataloging system as they combine several programs together on single disks, so nearly every catalogue will vary. Be prepared to send out some SAE's.

But by far the best method though, is to find a group of like-minded computer users to swap software with. But remember, just like stamps you will save a great deal of money if you have a decent basket of goodies which you can trade with other like-minded people – after all, that's what the Public Domain is all about.

Happy hunting.

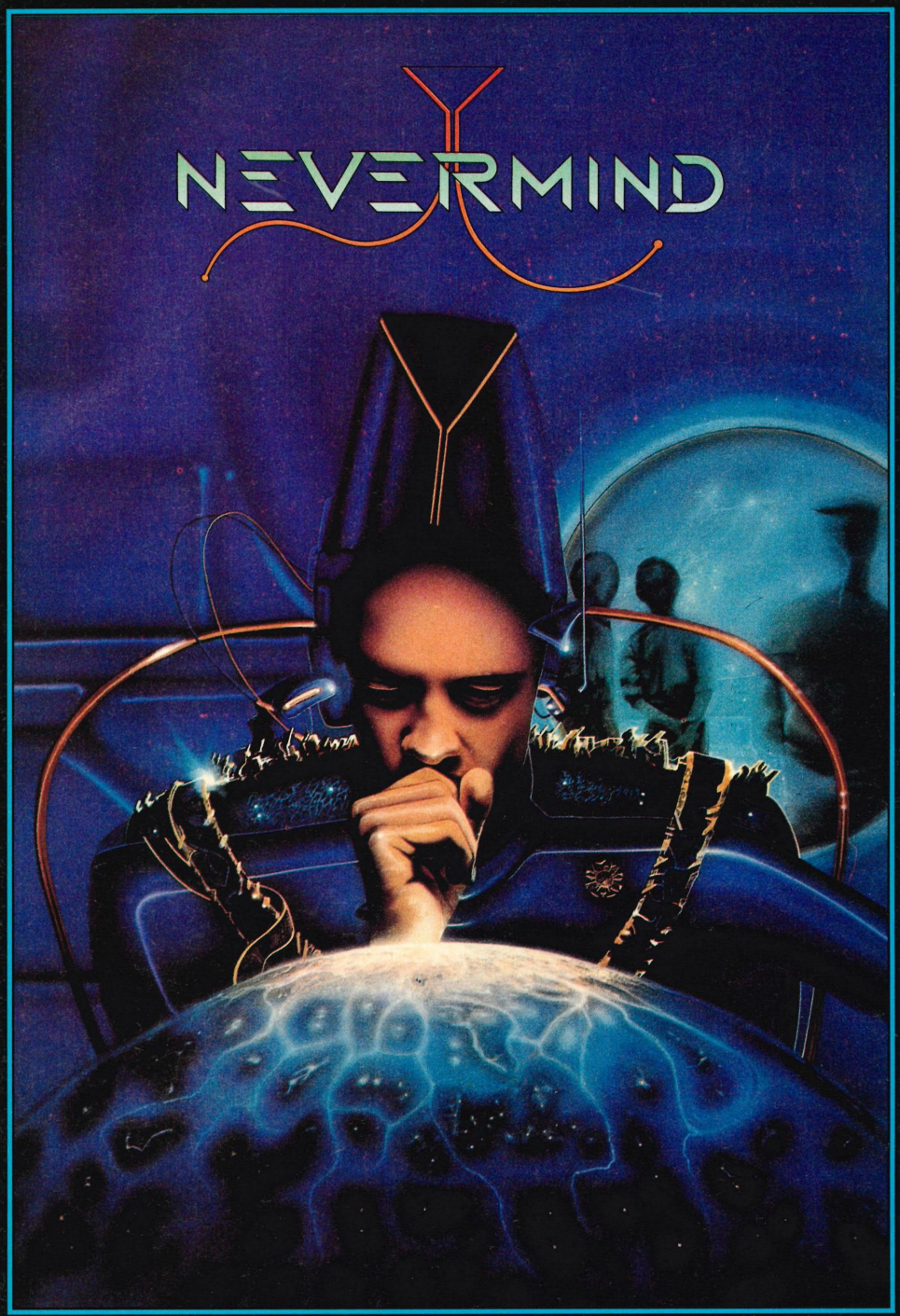
NOTICE BOARD

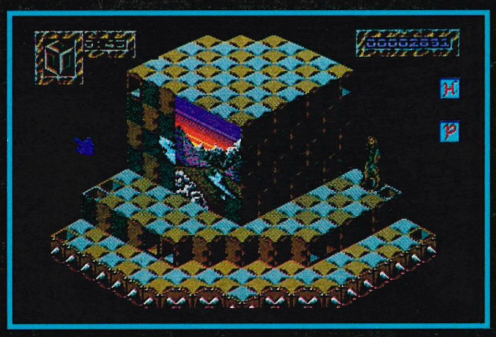
The following is by no means meant to be taken as a comprehensive guide to either the Public Domain or Shareware, however, it should provide a good beginner's guide. For those of you who want to delve a little deeper, most Universities and Colleges should have some sort of PD software collection – ask the computer department.

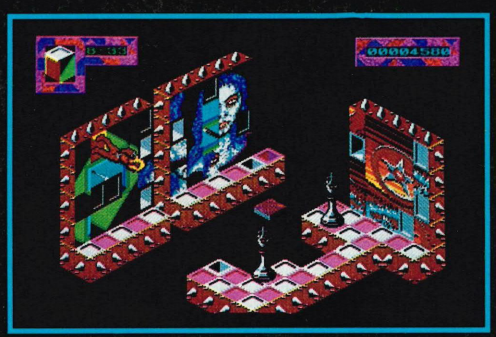
For Local clubs who will have PD Libraries to hand contact:
The British Association of Computer Clubs, 31 Queens Crescent, Clapham, Beds. MK41 6DB.

Typical Bulletin Boards (only some of thousands).

LONDON	**London Underground** 01 863 0198 24 hrs 12/2400
MIDLANDS	**Wolverhampton BBS** 0902 745337 24 hrs 12/2400
THE NORTH	**OBBS Manchester** 061 427 1596 24 hrs 300/1275
SOUTH EAST	**Software Source** 0892 661149 24 hrs 12/2400
	Felixstowe BBS 0394 673655 24 hrs 12/2400
SCOTLAND	**Busby's Grapevine** 041 762 2000 24 hrs 12/2400







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THE ANSWER TO ALL YOUR PROBLEMS
(AND THE CAUSE OF SOME NEW ONES)

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- ★ **OVER 250 DIFFERENT SCREENS & PUZZLES RANGING FROM THE EASY TO THE MIND BOGGLINGLY DIFFICULT**
- ★ **INTERACTIVE PLAYSCAPE**
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Never Mind is a unique combination of arcade action and mind numbing problem solving, and uses a clever blend of computer-generated and hand-crafted puzzles. Is your brain up to the most intriguing challenge of the decade? There's only one way to find out . . .

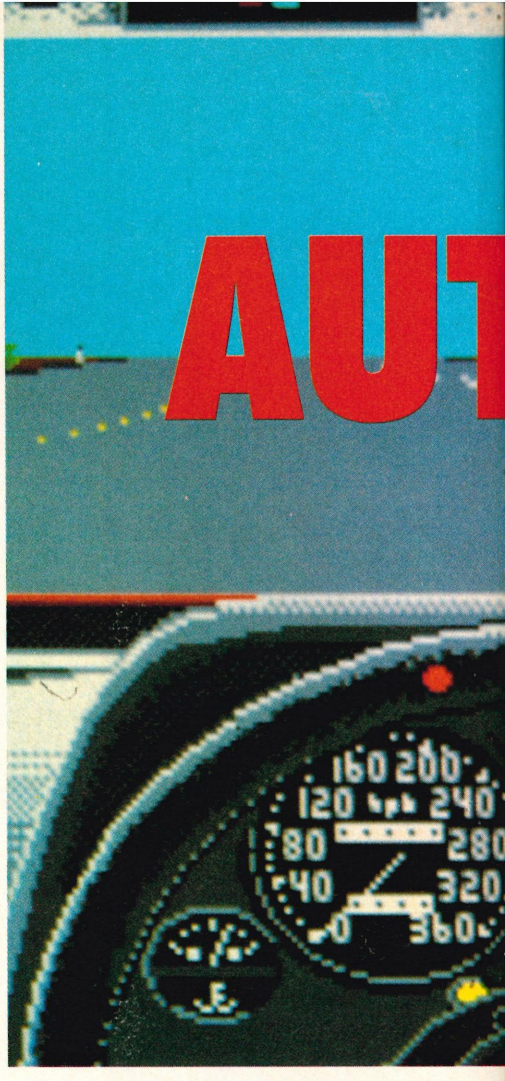
Screen Shots taken from the Amiga and PC Versions

ATARI ST £19.95 AMIGA £19.95 PC £24.95 051-709 5755

PSYGNOSIS

PSYGNOSIS
GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Save that spreadsheet, hang some fluffy dice from your monitor, and join Julian Rignall behind the wheels of some of the world's most desirable motors...



Driving games have been the mainstay of computer entertainment since their first appearance in the arcades in the mid 70's. The first crude attempts featured an overhead viewpoint and the object was usually nothing more complex than overtaking the other traffic. Their banality defies description...

Things changed (but not for the better) in 1979 when Atari bought out the first 3D racing game. Sporting a black and white display, *Night Driver* had you whizzing down a twisting road whose kerbs were made of white squares. Even so, an original copy of *Dbase* without instructions was more fun to use.

Sega made an attempt at producing a colour 3D driving game in '80 with a number called *Monaco GP*, but it was Atari's *Pole Position* that was the first to make a real impact. Featuring realistic graphics and adrenalin-pumping action, you really felt that you were driving a car in the Fuji Grand Prix. And since then, arcade driving games have become more and more realistic

REAL ROLLIN'

Step into an arcade today (go on, it's well worth it) and you can participate in all sorts of races. Atari's *Final Lap* allows up to eight players to race simultaneously if enough machines are plugged together, while Namco's *Winning Run* is a stunning machine which actually simulates a real formula I car, complete with incredibly realistic hydraulic action.

Even better is Sega's *Super Monaco GP*, a simulation of the *Monaco Grand Prix*, which is the fastest, most realistic and most unnerving driving experience you're likely to have outside of a real formula I car.

But the real humdinger once again comes from Atari. *Hard Drivin'* is another ultra-realistic simulation which literally places you at wheel of a turbo-charged Corvette and lets you loose on one of two tracks: a straightforward foot-down speed course, or the more adventurous stunt track which comes complete with a loop-the-loop and skid pan. The machine is incredible, featuring a five-speed gearbox, proper clutch controls and realistic steering wheel feedback.

The extent of *Hard Drivin'*s realism comes as no real surprise when you consider that it was originally developed as a fully-blown driving simulator and aimed at US driving schools. Luckily, Atari decided that it could make more money by souping the car up and adding some extra stunt features and selling it as an arcade machine.

FAST MOVERS

But you don't have to make to leave your home or office to experience some racing thrills. A number of driving programs are currently available for MS-DOS machines, ranging from straightforward racers to complex simulations.

Obviously, the higher the spec of your PC, the better the games will be. A colour standard of at least EGA is recommended — Testarossas look awful in purple and blue — and make sure you've got a clock speed of at least 8Mhz, otherwise you won't get that essential impression of speed.

Here we'll take five of the best for a test drive and give you our impressions, but why not get along to your local shop and try them out for yourself — after all, you've nothing to lose but your licence.

OUTRUN

Sega: (021) 625 3388
£24.99

What more could you want? A flash motor, a girl at your side and the open road ahead, free from traffic police and any inconveniences like speed limits. If you're one of those people who likes to read reams of technical specifications and lists of torque ratios, then pass this one by, as *OutRun* barely allows you the time to put on your seat belt before it plonks you on the starting grid. The race is time-based, with extra time added as you make it from checkpoint to checkpoint. There are 15 different routes in all, each featuring its own landscape and hazards, adding lasting appeal as you attempt to travel them all. *OutRun* differs from most of the 'simulations' featured here, as it's an unashamed, heads-down arcade racer. The controls are basic (there are only two gears) and the courses are designed to reduce braking to a minimum. The gameplay is challenging and addictive, the graphics are smooth, colourful and fast, and there's even a variety of soundtracks to accompany your manic motoring, resulting in a driving experience that for sheer speed and excitement is second to none.

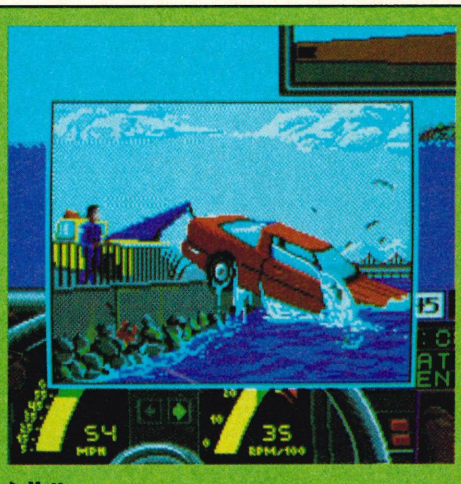
LOMBARD RAC RALLY

Mandarin: (0625) 878888
£24.95

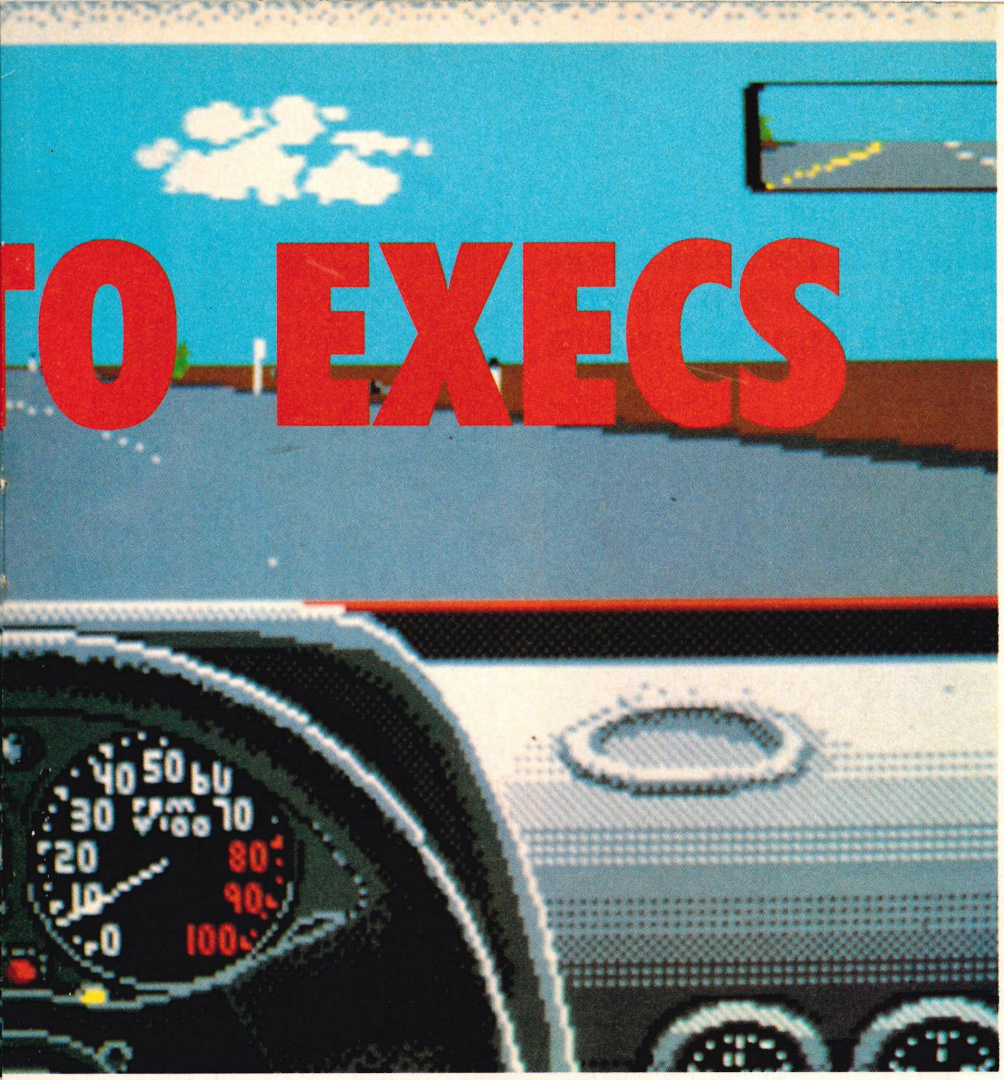
Based on the infamous round-Britain rally,

▶ OutRun.

▶ Lombard RAC Rally.



▶ Vette.



Mandarin's addition to the starting grid places the emphasis heavily on simulation, attempting to realistically recreate the sights, sounds and smells of manhandling a Sierra RS Cosworth around some of this island's more treacherous roads. The object is to ultimately compete in the entire 15 stage rally, but first you can practice, adjust the car's specifications and even take part in a TV interview (which is really a way to win money to buy more add-ons for your motor). The courses are twisting and hilly, displayed in gut-wrenchingly realistic 3D, and negotiating them requires good use of the five-speed gearbox and brakes — it's not just a case of keeping the pedal to the metal. This is a superb racing game, combining excellent visual effects and great gameplay to give one of the most realistic on-screen driving experiences yet seen on a PC. And just to add extra value, it comes complete with an interesting and informative instruction manual and course maps! Oh yes, and a pretty naff sticker...

VETTE

Spectrum Holobyte: (01) 928 1454
£34.99

On paper, Spectrum Holobyte's Corvette simulation looks astounding. The programmers have managed to recreate the entire San Fransisco street map for you to race around in either a Ferrari F40, Porsche 959, or Corvette. Options at the start allow you to select your 3D viewpoint (from either inside or outside the car), and following that you select one of five starting points and race to the finish post in the fastest possible time. At first this seems fun, especially when you run over your first pedestrian (some of the jaywalkers look suspiciously like nuns), but it lacks challenge — the car can take unlimited damage, and crashing into another vehicle or building simply slows you down a little. It's a shame that *Vette* doesn't live up to its potential, but as it stands it's little more than an impressive graphics demo with very short-term novelty appeal.

THE DUEL: TEST DRIVE II

Accolade: (01) 585 3308
£24.99

European sports cars continue their domination of PC simulations, as *The Duel* is basically a race between the two fastest production cars ever built, the Ferrari F40 and the Porsche 959. Although the concept is good and the introductory sequences are impressive, *The Duel* is let down by one major flaw: the impression of movement is slow (even on a 26Mhz machine!). This is particularly unforgivable when the speedometer is registering over 150mph and the car appears to be crawling slower than an average family saloon. Those who like scenery may be interested in the two add-on disks available for use with this program: *The Supercars*, which lets you drive five additional cars, a Corvette ZR1, Lamborghini Countach, Porsche 911, Ferrari Testarossa and a Lotus Esprit, and *The California Challenge*, which features five new courses to race.

FERRARI FORMULA ONE

Electronic Arts: (0753) 46465
£24.99

Those of you who have as much interest in what goes on under the bonnet as behind the wheel will happily roll up their sleeves and get stuck into this one. Endorsed by the Italian racing team, *Ferrari Formula One* allows you to be team manager, mechanic and driver, as you tune the car to suit each track on the circuit, decide when and where to practice and, ultimately, get behind the wheel and compete in an entire world championship. The graphics are colourful and effective, and the game is very playable. The frame rate is quite jerky on low-range PCs, but the feeling of speed is still there, and the challenge of winning an entire Grand Prix series will be enough to keep enthusiasts glued to the monitor.

►The Duel: Test Drive II.

►Ferrari Formula One.

THE FINISH LINE

And so to the honours... it's true that driving games are generally of a higher standard than most other programs. This could either be because of the wealth of technical information available to the programmers or maybe just a good old-fashioned love of the subject matter. Although the competition was genuinely close, one program did stand out form the rest because of its combination of authenticity and depth. Mandarin's *Lombard RAC Rally* takes the honours, but honourable mention must also go to *Ferrari Formula One*, and, for pure arcade action, *OutRun* shouldn't go unnoticed. Whatever your taste, there's bound to be a driver out there to suit you, so get on the road and happy motoring.

The second installment in Database's Fun School series allows you to learn as you play. Garth Sumpter was kept behind to write these lines.

Nowadays, when you can hardly buy a box of tissues without coming into contact with some form of microchip machinery, few parents can fail to appreciate the growing importance of computers in all aspects of everyday life. Most, therefore, should welcome an opportunity to give their children an introduction to these machines at an early age.

The capacity for learning is far greater in the primary school child than at any later stage, so with this in mind, it's difficult to comprehend why education software is a market so poorly patronised – especially as it affords the child early hands-on keyboard experience and provides a tireless and cheap tutor with a potentially boundless repertoire of subjects.

Database Educational Software first opened the doors to its *Fun School* in 1985 when Peter Davidson, a former teacher, decided that computers could be used as an educational tool for children of primary school age. At this time, the driving thrust of the Government's computer literacy program was spearheaded by the BBC computer, so it was on this machine that the first *Fun School* began.

For that first effort, and for this updated version, Davidson liaised with other teachers and educationalists in an attempt to create the definitive computer learning program.

There are three classes: for the under sixes, the six to eights and over eights. Each program is menu driven, giving a choice of eight 'games', covering number, colour, shape, and word games at various levels of complexity. The difficulty level can be set by the parent, with the new selection becoming the 'default' option in each successive loading.

Although there are eight sub-sections on each program, the basic thrust of each is the same: questions or puzzles are presented, with the child's resulting keyboard stroke followed by an audio/visual response – a correct answer is reinforced with a dancing character and happy tune, while a sad character greets an incorrect response.

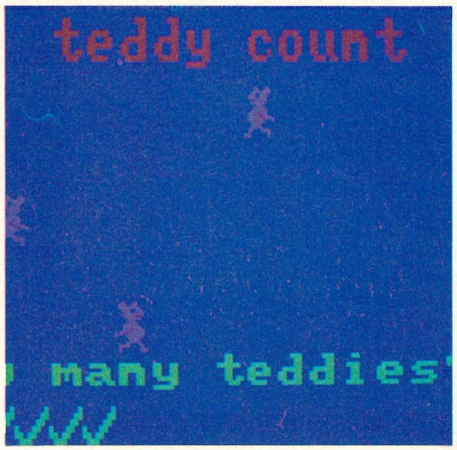
And now for the roll call...

Under 5ixes

SHAPE SNAP This is simply shape recognition using squares, triangles, rectangles, stars and circles, where the child identifies when two shapes are the same and indicates this by pressing the space bar (if the shapes are different then any other key is used).

FIND THE MOLE A group of molehills are numbered from one to five in their ascending order of size – but only one is home to a mole. The child presses a number, and if it's correct, the mole burrows out. If the wrong number is pressed they are told if the actual number is bigger or smaller than their selection, giving an idea of numbers and their relational sizes.

TEDDY COUNT A group of one to nine



teddies is counted as they dance around or line up at the top of the screen. There are three difficulty levels, giving three, six and nine teddies respectively.

WRITE A LETTER Is simply a word processor with a BIG typeface that uses all the normal functions of a keyboard. Upper and lower case, delete keys and numbers are all active and are accessed via a large teddy bear cursor.

COLOUR TRAIN Begins with a coloured train on a simple track with three individually coloured stations. The child stops the train by pressing the spacebar when it reaches a station which matches its colour – a correct matching sees passengers get on and off before the train changes colour and continues its journey. Passengers could be counted on and off the train but there is no way to input these numbers to the computer, so that some supervision is needed if this dimension is to be included. Unfortunately, the machine's colour capabilities have not been used to the full, some of the colours on later levels appear to be quite similar and judgements have to be quite precise.

PICK A LETTER Is an exercise in letter recognition. A letter is shown, and it's up to the child to select its match from the adjacent alphabet, dragged to the target space and dropped. Short words are used on higher levels, and can be edited to include personalised lists.

SPELL A WORD One of 10 simple pictures is shown and the child types the displayed object's name.

TEDDY BEAR PICNIC Use the arrow keys to guide Teddy through (increasingly difficult) mazes to find his lunch.

Six To Eights

NUMBER TRAIN Identical to *Colour Train* for the under sixes, with the inclusion of an addition and subtraction element as passengers enter and leave the carriage. There are three difficulty levels: the first covers numbers up to 10, the second goes up to 19 with numbers up to nine being used in calculations, while the third goes up to 99 with 35 being the greatest amount subtracted or added.

SHOPPING Four shops are represented, each with its own particular speciality (be it toys, food, pets, sweets etc). A shopping list is displayed, containing one highlighted item which the child then guides the frog towards.

MATHS MAZE Using the arrow keys, guide the frog along a path. When a robot guard is encountered, a mathematical question is asked. To pass, the correct answer must be entered. Over four levels, the questions cover addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

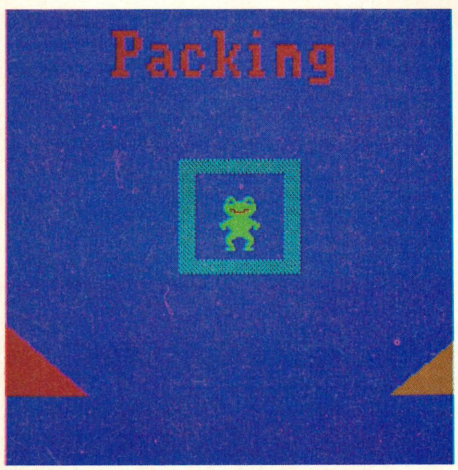
TREASURE HUNT Find the buried treasure by entering letter/number coordinates for the rows and columns that criss-cross the island map. This *Battleships* type game is supplemented by a 'cold, warm, hot, hotter' response to each input until the treasure is found. Previous move4s are shown on earlier levels.

BOUNCE Involves bouncing a ball off walls to hit a target point. All angles are either horizontal, vertical or 45 degrees and the ball is released either vertically or diagonally to

L'S OUT

show the basic trigonometric law of angles of incidence being equal to angles of reflection. There are five levels – the last one being fairly tricky!

PACKING An empty square is filled using various angular shapes. Three levels progress from working out simple solutions to rotating shapes with the Enter key in order to make them fit.



CATERPILLAR A positive *Hangman* variant, where the hidden word must be discovered so that the caterpillar can eat an apple. Underlines show how many letters there are in a word and how many chances are left – 10 on level one, nine on level two etc.

NUMBER JUMP The frog is guided across a grid of numbered lily pads by only landing on numbers that are multiples of two and 10 on level one, three and five on level two, four and six on level three and multiples of seven, eight and nine on level four.

Over Eights

Included with the manual are a separate set of notes and solutions for parents and teachers. Also, each successful completion of a game gives a key word which is needed to play the last game, *Escape*.

BUILD A BRIDGE Similar to the packing game in the previous program but shapes can be rotated by 45 degrees.

PASSAGE OF GUARDIANS An anagram is solved in order to gain passage past each successive guardian. Three levels cover four, five and six letter words.

UNICORN An exercise in logic where the child takes an apple, a worm and a bird to a waiting unicorn. Only one item can be carried and neither the apple and worm nor the bird and worm can be left together (as one will become lunch for the other). To add to the problem, a forest fire restricts the time available, increasing in speed from level to level.

LOGIC DOORS A maze is filled with numerous colour-coded doors and corresponding keys (only two of which can be carried at once). The object is to work your way to the final room which contains the keyword.

SOUVENIRS Visit all countries shown on a map of Europe and buy a souvenir in each one. You have a budget in sterling and must convert it to the currency of the country visited using the exchange rate shown. This involves some mental arithmetic and introduces the idea of exchange rates.

CODE BOXES A series of boxes are opened by typing in the numbers shown on them. Easy? Not really, because all the numbers are shown in binary code. If after a couple of attempts the numbers are wrong, the box opens to reveal the correct answer.

MYSTERY MACHINE A machine is shown along with its coded operating instructions. To solve this problem you move the cursor over a symbol, hit space then type and enter the letter which you think is represented by it. That symbol is them replaced by the letter wherever it appears. Once uncoded the operating instructions for the machine are carried out and, if correct, the last keyword for Escape is given.

ESCAPE Having collected all the seven keywords by successfully completing all the games, you can play *Escape*. It takes place in a maze similar to the one in *Logic Doors* but without keys. At certain points, key words need to be used to overcome obstacles like rivers, doors etc. Each word however, can only be used once.

CONCLUSION...

The *Under Sixes* program actually does encourage shape, number, word and colour recognition, but surely the single key presses could have been supplemented with the use of the Enter key here and there – in fact, this option could have been exercised more widely across all three programs. After all, in terms of the computer keyboard skills that the manual places some emphasis upon, the Enter key plays a central role and it's strange that this is only used in *Pick A Letter* – and then only to drop letters that may be accidentally picked up. It seems strange that the Delete key wasn't used for this, as it is by far the more logical choice.

The manual also suggests that a computer keyboard can be a confusion for youngsters and suggests that keys can be highlighted with the use of coloured stickers. Good advice indeed, so why was a badge included when the addition of the suggested stickers would have proved far more useful?

And while we're at it, why is the Word Processor only included for the under sixes version when the older child would find it a useful tool for their even more creative mind. This would have promoted keyboard skills, and if a printer driver was included it could have further served to increase a child's computer knowledge.

There are many good points about *Fun School* and some of the learning exercises seem to be pitched exactly right. It is a shame therefore, that most of the disappointment stems from small touches in programming and implementation that would have been easy to rectify. Why, for example is there no option for choosing your optimum graphics standard – especially as the programs make such a liberal use of colour?

Let's hope that Database is itself open to education and will allow the product to grow sufficiently into the inevitable Fun School 3.

NOTICE BOARD

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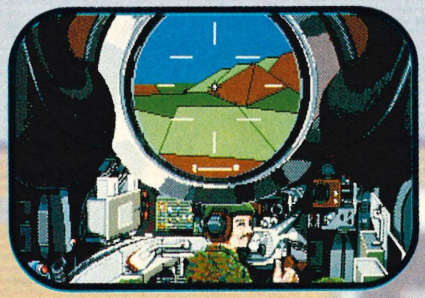
ENTERTAININ

TANK™
Spectrum Holobyte



This is the finest simulation of a modern battle tank ever produced, not only does it fully reproduce the characteristics of an Abrams M1, but it creates the most realistic environment EVER in which to do battle. Taking charge at company, platoon or unit level. The sense of interaction with the environment is unrivalled. And with supreme 3-D solid graphics, the feeling of "being there" is complete.

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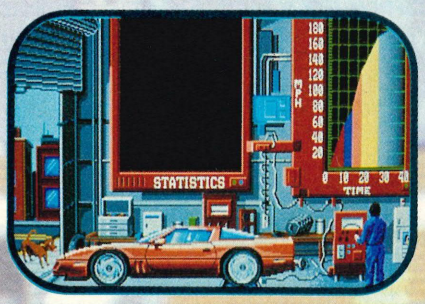

Outstanding 3-D solid modelling graphics. Accurate mapping of San Francisco streets and landmarks. Real manoeuvrability. Test performance factors of each Corvette. Varying difficulty levels. Option to choose from 4 Corvettes. So get set, buckle up and rev up. But a word of caution – don't be too reckless or you might leave more than your heart in San Francisco!

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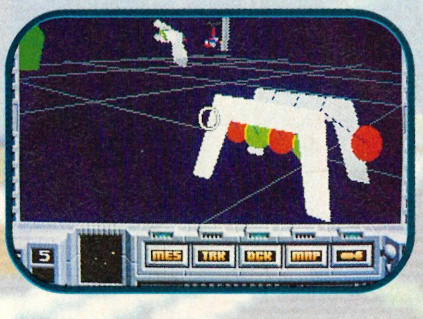

The dreams of the future are now reality, fully trained professionals whose purpose is to create optically stored REM moments – dreams to obliterate the cares of waking thought. As a rogue dreamer you have to enter the mainframe and direct your partner within the Dream Track Corporation to retrieve the latest Dream Track – the minds of every future generation will be relying on your skill and intellect.

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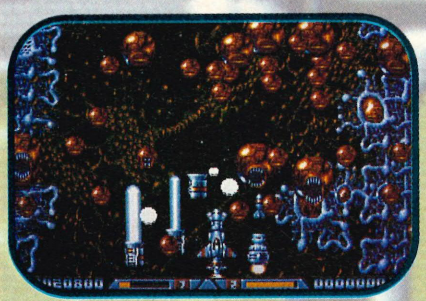

XENON 2. HARD, FAST COIN-OP QUALITY destructive action with a HOT soundtrack to match, a mind blowingly accurate David Whittaker rendition of the "Bomb The Bass" track "Megablast." **XENON 2:** it's out of this world. The One 93%. C&VG HIT 96%. Amiga Computing 100%. Atari ST User 10/10.

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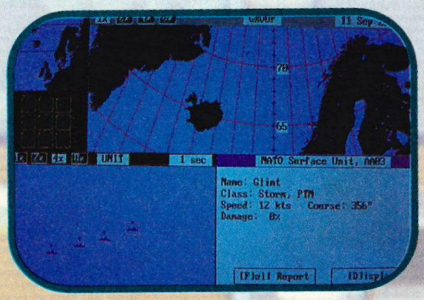
HARPOON™
PSS



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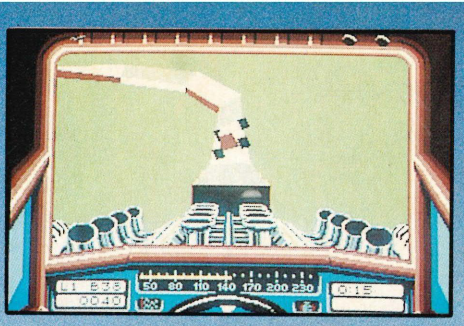
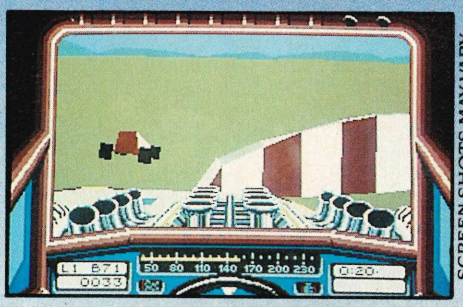
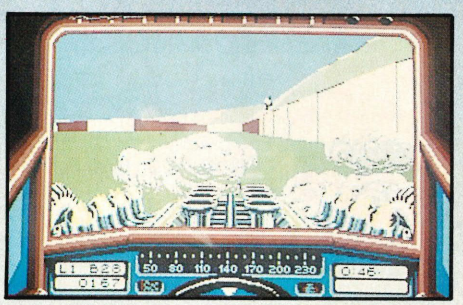
STUNT CAR RACER







SCREEN SHOTS MAY VARY

Step into the driving seat of one of the most wicked stunt cars around as a Stunt Car Racer. It's now up to you to prove just how good you are and to see whether or not you can ultimately become Division One Champion.

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Battle it out on the track against other computer controlled rivals, such as, Dare Devil and Road Hog. Race and jump so fast that your car starts to break up under the strain and then accelerate even more. There's no prizes for being second best in this game – it's all or nothing.

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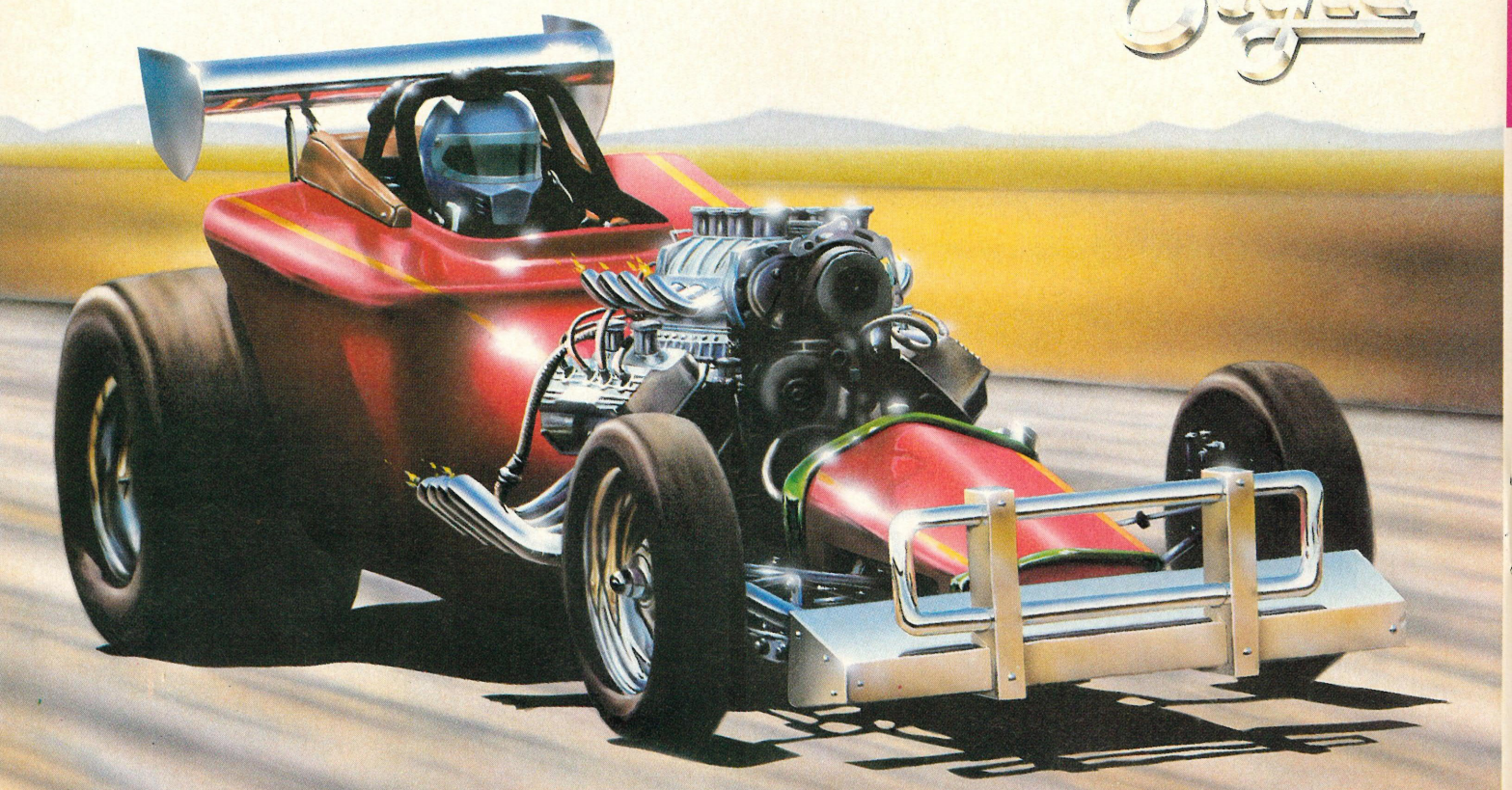
Micro Style



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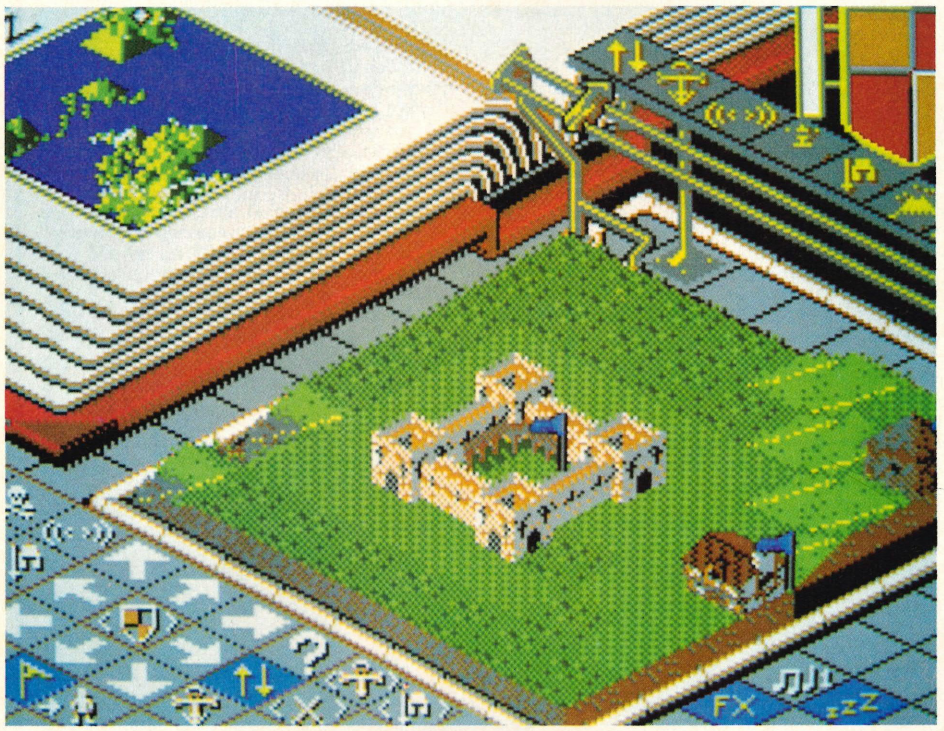
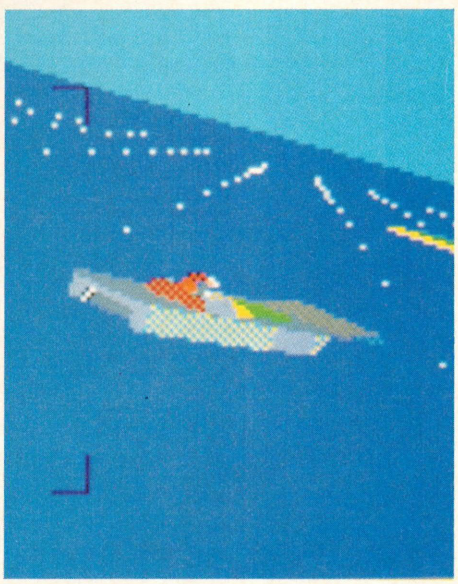
Stein

REVIEW

The definitive guide to MS-DOS gaming





►Three of the best in IBM-compatible gaming (clockwise from top): Electronic Arts' *Populous*, *Carrier Command* from Rainbird and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* from Lucasfilm.

Close the door, loosen your tie, flex your fingers and prepare to get stuck into the largest collection of games MS-DOS games software ever assembled between two covers. Even so, this is a far from exhaustive selection – for example, there isn't a single flight simulator covered (we'll get to those at a later date), and there are enough Role-Playing and text adventure games available to fill a magazine twice the size of this one. But what we do promise is that what's here is definitive – each game has been thoroughly tested by an expert, so the rating it receives is an authoritative guide to its worth (see below for a clarification of the ratings system). The information panel above each review is designed to condense as much product information as possible into the minimum of space. The publisher information (price, telephone number) is for those of you who have difficulty in finding the games you desire – if you can't find it, give the publisher a ring and they'll be happy to point you in the right direction. The information immediately below shows which media (disk size) the game is available on, which graphics standard it supports and whether it uses a mouse or joystick (the vast majority of games use the keyboard as their standard controller). The system is simple: there's a small box following each point – if it's filled in then that particular item is included, if not, it isn't... simple.

SEEING STARS

The rating system is about as simple as it's possible to be. But for those who'd like a little explanation, here goes...

★★★★★
A sure-fire chart topper

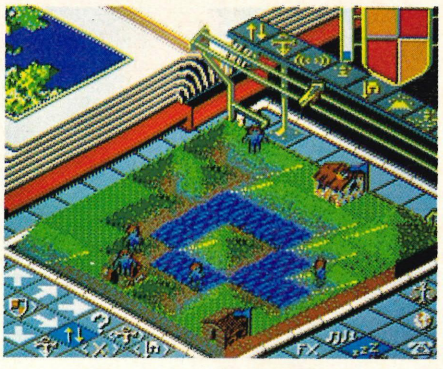
★★★★
Better than average

★★★
Good for fans of the type

★★
Running out of excuses

★
Lacking any redeeming feature

LET THERE BE LIGHT



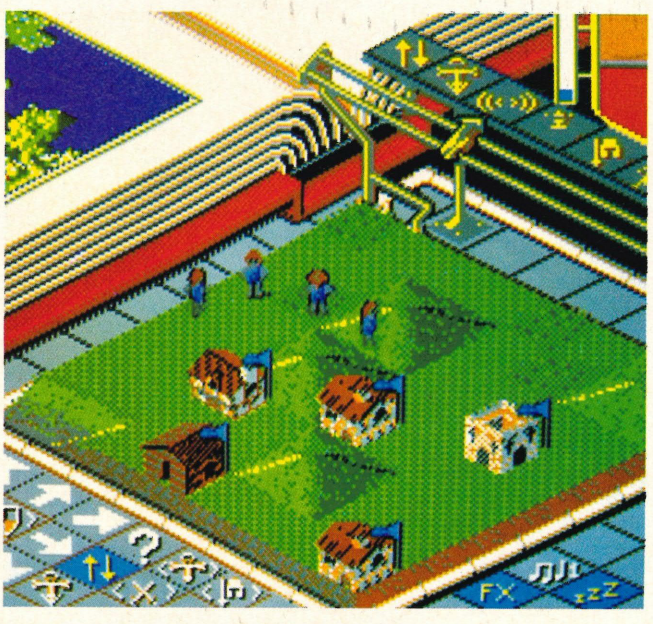
POPULOUS

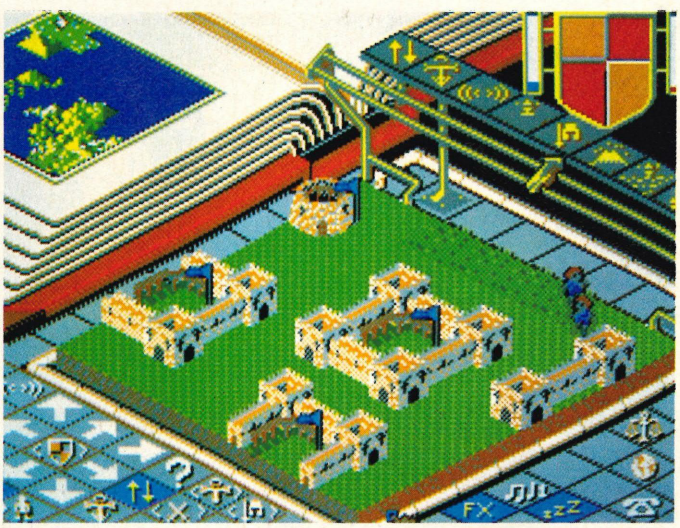
Electronic Arts: (0753) 46465
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Hercules □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

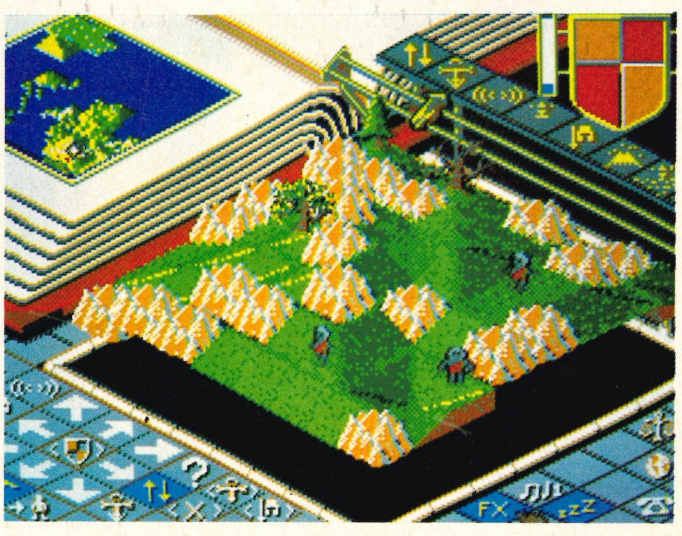
THE GAME that shook the worlds of Atari ST and Commodore Amiga gaming is finally available for the PC – and the good news is that it's lost nothing in the translation. Converted by Bullfrog Productions, the team behind the originals, *Populous* makes you an omnipotent deity (representing either the forces of good or evil) with the aim of expanding your empire across the Universe. Across 500 separate worlds you pit your wits against a rival deity for control of the planet and its primitive inhabitants. Since both you and your opponent are immortal, the battle is fought between your respective tribes of mortal followers. Despite your Godly position, you cannot simply smite the opposition with bolts of lightning – divine power (Manna) is earned by expanding your tribe of followers. Initially the planet's terrain isn't ideal for settling, so it's necessary to level the land (the only divine power available at the outset), allowing settlements to be built and, subsequently, for nature to take its course and more followers to be produced. As your tribe increases, your Manna level grows, allowing you to get down to more Old Testament stuff to thwart the opposition's progress – the higher your Manna level, the more options there are open to you. You can summon Swamps to trap anyone who walks over them, create death-dealing Knights to seek out the enemy, cause volcanoes and Earthquakes, Flood the entire landscape and even bring about the end of the world in the form of Armageddon. But beware – anything you can do, he can do – and probably will! But it's not just the concept that's excellent, the execution is virtually flawless and perfectly structured in a similar fashion to classics such as Othello and Chess. It only takes half an hour or so to learn the basic concepts involved, but there's enough depth to the strategy to keep a Karpov scratching his head well into the night. Lasting appeal is no problem either – the 500 landscapes range from the easy to the downright diabolical, and if that's not enough, the program is capable of generating a further 128,000 landscapes at random! Add to that a World Generator that allows you to create your own scenarios (much like setting up a Chess problem) and a two-player mode which allows two machines (any combination of ST, Amiga or PC) to be linked via modem or serial cable, and you've got what is undoubtedly one of the most enjoyable, compulsive and timeless computer games ever to grace your PC. And for those who still want more, an expansion disk containing 500 extra landscapes and new worlds is also available, priced at £9.99.

★★★★★

Gary Whitta







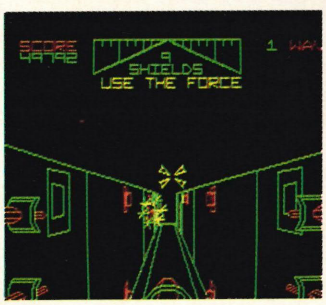
WASTELAND

Electronic Arts: (0753) 46465
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick □

ROLE-Playing Games (RPGs) are basically adventure games where the player develops a 'character' whose physical and mental attributes develop over a number of scenarios laid down by an impartial judge – in most cases the computer. Produced by Interplay, the US-based team behind the phenomenally

successful *Bard's Tale* series, *Wasteland* represents something of a first for an RPG. Instead of taking place in some mythical world of swords and sorcery, the action unfolds in a post-holocaust Earth. Better still, the usual spells and staffs are replaced by flamethrowers, anti-tank rockets and Uzi sub-machine guns which are used against opponents ranging from mutants evolved from radioactive slime to Hell's Angels and gun-toting monks! It's exactly this mix of hard-core adventuring and trigger-pumping action that makes *Wasteland* such immense fun. Get it, and lose yourself for weeks in a world of horror and fantasy!

★★★★★
Gary Whitta

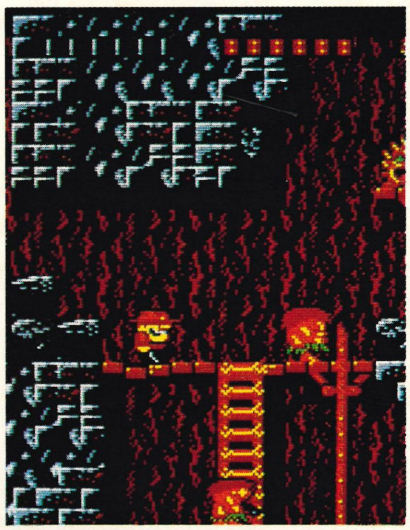


STAR WARS

Domark: (01) 780 2222
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" □
CGA ■ EGA □ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

THE FORCE has been with us for over a decade now, but George Lucas' interstellar trilogy still generates as much interest today as it did when Luke Skywalker first lost his patience with Obi Wan Kenobi. The three films were all honoured by a licensed arcade machine (from the unfeasibly large Atari Corporation), but this, the first, remains dear to the hearts of many arcade fanatics – mostly because it was the machine which popularised the now-ubiquitous sit-down cabinet. But it wasn't only popular because of such trimmings – blasting Empire fighters and launching the now-legendary attack on Vader's Death Star (via the thermal exhaust port) was, and remains, one of computer gaming's finest moments. This rendition captures as much of the original's atmosphere and excitement as anyone could expect – and even the CGA-only restriction is hardly noticeable. It may have aged a little, but *Star Wars* will still appeal to anyone who likes compulsive shooting action. And by the way, if you do get a copy, try pressing F4 for some interesting results.

★★★★
Ciarán Brennan



RICK DANGEROUS

Firebird: (0666) 504326
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Hercules □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

HE'S TOUGH, he's mean and he makes Indiana Jones look like Pee Wee Herman. He's Rick Dangerous, intrepid archaeologist devoted to the recovery of priceless artifacts – no matter what the risk. Snazzily dressed in a felt hat and leather jacket, Rick battles through four scenarios of increasing difficulty: the action begins in a ruined South American temple and goes on through an Egyptian pyramid and a Colditz-style prison before reaching an explosive climax within a secret missile base. Progress is made by running, climbing and jumping to and from the walkways, platforms and ladders that make up each 30-screen level. But of course it's not quite as simple as that. Practically every screen is laden with hidden peril in the form of spear traps, punji pits, deadly spikes, collapsing roofs and an army of patrolling guards who would like nothing more than to show how much more dangerous they are than Rick. Our hero has more than his wits to rely on though, as his belt contains a pointed stick, a six-shooter and six sticks of dynamite. The revolver comes in handy for killing anyone who gets too close, as does the dynamite (although this is better employed destroying walls and other obstacles that block Rick's path). Both of these commodities, however, are in short supply and need to be restocked constantly. The stick isn't quite so devastating, but it's invaluable when it comes to triggering traps and rendering them harmless. With computer games becoming more involved and complicated, it's refreshing to see a wonderfully simple game like this. *Rick Dangerous* strikes just the right balance between puzzle solving and dexterity – don't miss it.

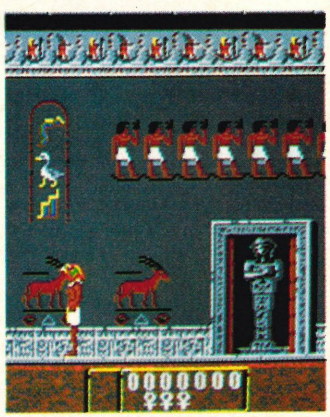
★★★★★
Gary Whitta

EYE OF HORUS

Logotron: (01) 359 3594
£29.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

AN ANCIENT Egyptian legend provides the storyline for an innovative adventure in which the player attempts to destroy your late father's brother, the evil god Set. But you need help, and it doesn't come easy... Seven pieces of your father, Osiris, are scattered throughout a large maze-like tomb – collect and assemble them and you are ready to take Set on. The going's made a little difficult by Set's minions, which are best shot or avoided. Fortunately, you can transform into a bullet-spitting Hawk, and better still, increase your powers by collecting relevant objects. The exploring, transforming and shooting action isn't very immediate, but the quality of the blend becomes apparent with perseverance.

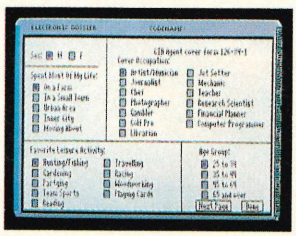
★★★
Brian Nesbitt



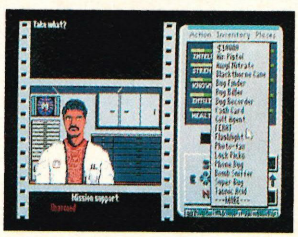
Blood, Swe

Enter the present. Tense.

Accolade has crafted two contemporary role playing games that are guaranteed to raise your heart rate and send shivers down your spine.



The Third Courier™ casts you in the role of "Moondancer"—a master spy with virtually limitless character options.

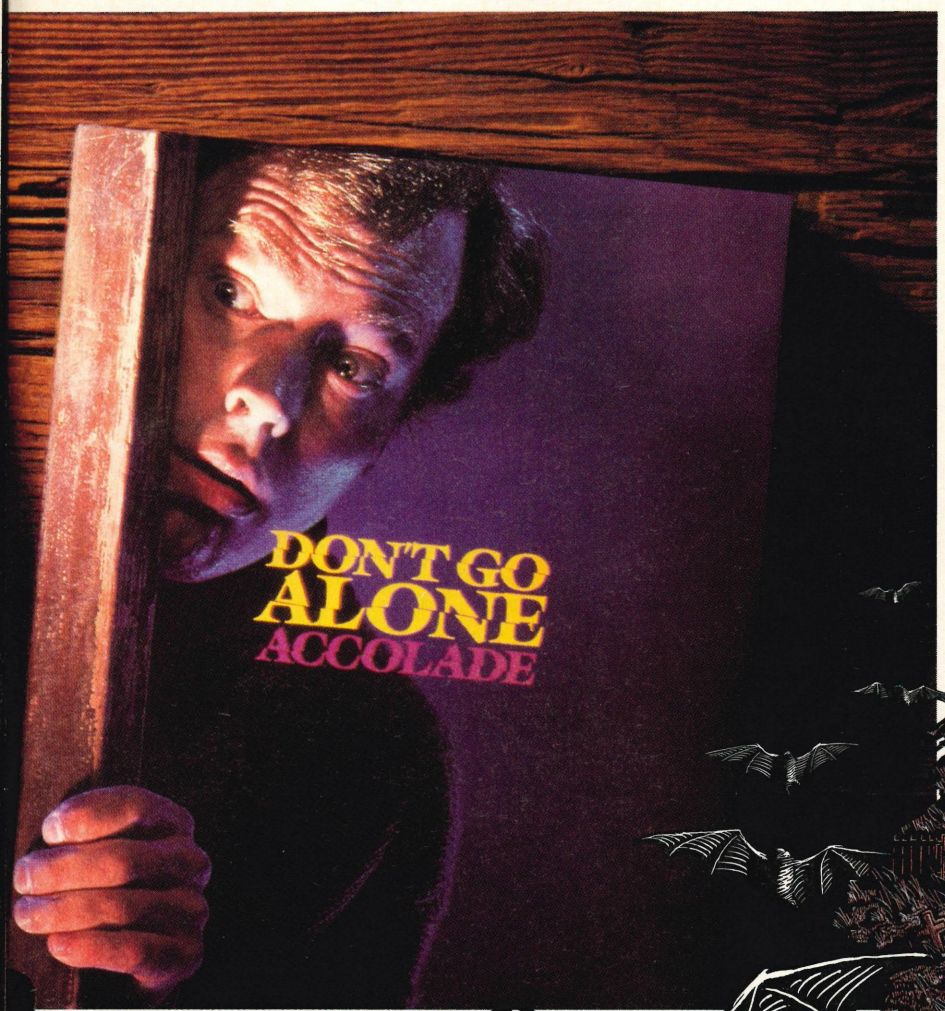


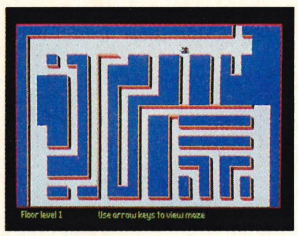
Your mission? Track down the Third Courier—a ruthless assassin hiding out in modern-day Berlin with hijacked NATO defense plans. He murdered two couriers to get them. Now he'll stop at nothing to sell these critical documents to the highest bidder.

Berlin. It's the perfect place for a spy to die.

Actual game screens from IBM PC EGA version of the game. Other versions may vary.

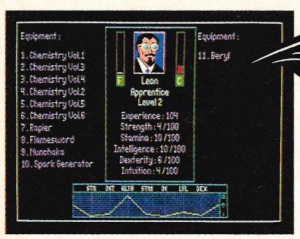
at & Fears.





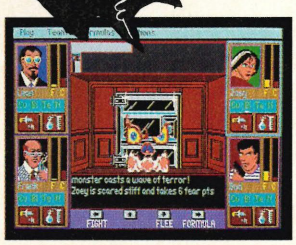
attempting to solve the mysteries of this enormous "fortress of fright." Now you, joined by an expert team of 16 polter-professionals, are destined to battle the 100 monsters that dwell inside the multi-level mansion.

Remember... don't go alone.



Or maybe you'd like to go some place scary? Really scary?

Journey to the haunted house on the hill in *Don't Go Alone.*™ Your Grandfather went mad



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BATTLE CHESS

Electronic Arts: (0453) 46465
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick □

CHESS is Chess is Chess, right? Wrong. Forget the stuffy old inanimate version you're used to and get stuck into *Battle Chess*, where the pieces are more than just representations of armies and nobility – they're alive! Here, the Bishop comes complete with flowing robes and crook, the Knights wear glistening armour and the Rook transforms from a stationary castle into a man of rock! Look out too for the glamorous Queen, dwarfish Pawns and the wise old King who shuffles slowly from square to square. Even more innovative though, are the combat sequences that take place when one piece 'takes' another: the Pawns cut off the Knights' arms and legs one by one, the Rook pounds his adversaries into the floor, while the King blows his enemies away with a Magnum! A 2D mode is available for the serious player, with the computer playing a very good game on the later levels (although response times suffer accordingly). *Battle Chess* breathes new life into an age-old classic, without losing any of the original's depth.

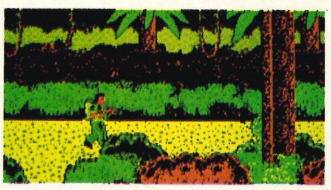
★★★★

Brian Nesbitt

PLATOON

Ocean: (061) 832 6633
£19.95
5¼" ■ 3½" □
CGA ■ EGA □ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

BASED on Oliver Stone's Oscar-winning Vietnam epic, *Platoon* casts you as a rookie 'grunt' beginning a year's tour of duty in 1969. Spread over six sections, which roughly relate to the movie's major moments, the



object is to survive long enough to terminate your evil platoon leader, Barnes. The first two sections see you exploring the maze-like jungle in search of the local village, while Section Three takes place in the enemy's sewer-like underground tunnel network. The fourth part sees you holed up in a bunker under heavy enemy fire, and is followed by more jungle exploration, this time in an attempt to seek shelter from an impending napalm attack. But despite the variety of elements, there's no feeling of tension or excitement generated and the high level of difficulty may cause interest to wane before the later levels are reached.

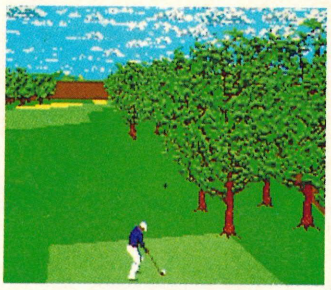
★★

Brian Nesbitt

CALIFORNIA PRO GOLF

16 Blitz: (01) 727 8070
£4.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick □

GET OUT of that office, rattle those woods and irons, as this low-cost golf simulation allows up to four players to compete (in either stroke or matchplay) over one of two courses on the sunny West Coast of America. Just



about every option is catered for, including wind speed, club selection, distance and ball direction – but somehow it doesn't all hang together. The distance attained by each club isn't different enough, while the wind (no matter how strong) doesn't appear to make a great deal of difference to the ball's flight. But by far the greatest fault is the putting section: the ball and hole are represented as white and black dots from an aerial viewpoint, in what must be the most unexciting graphic display ever to grace a game of this type. Even taking into account its fiver price tag, *California Pro Golf* is disappointing: the above faults, coupled with an almost unfathomable score board mar what could have been straight down the middle, but ended up hooking into deep rough.

★★

Ciarán Brennan

THE CYCLES

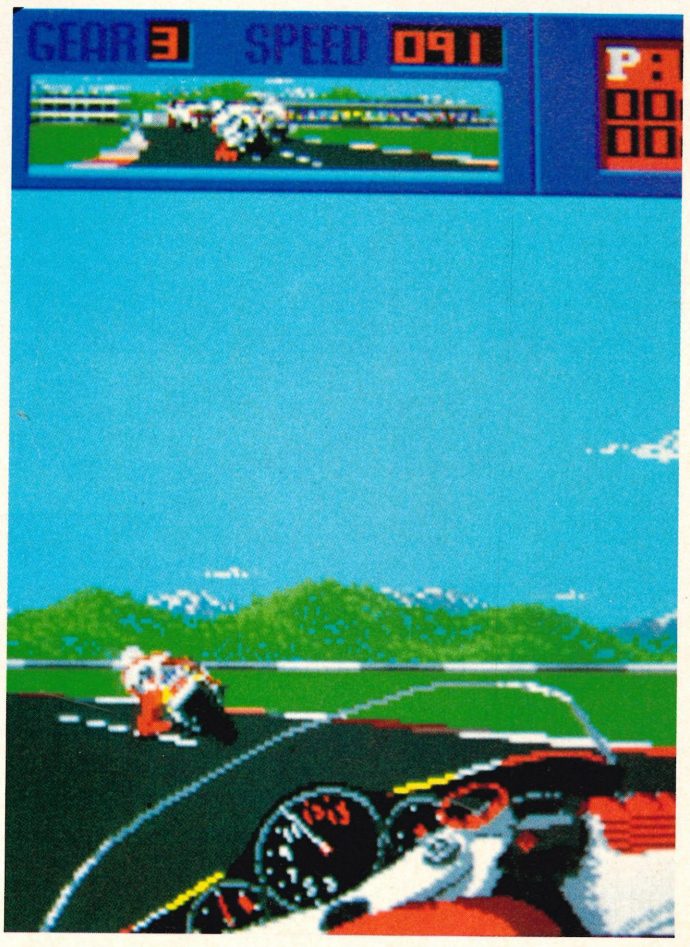
Accolade: (01) 585 3308
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Hercules □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

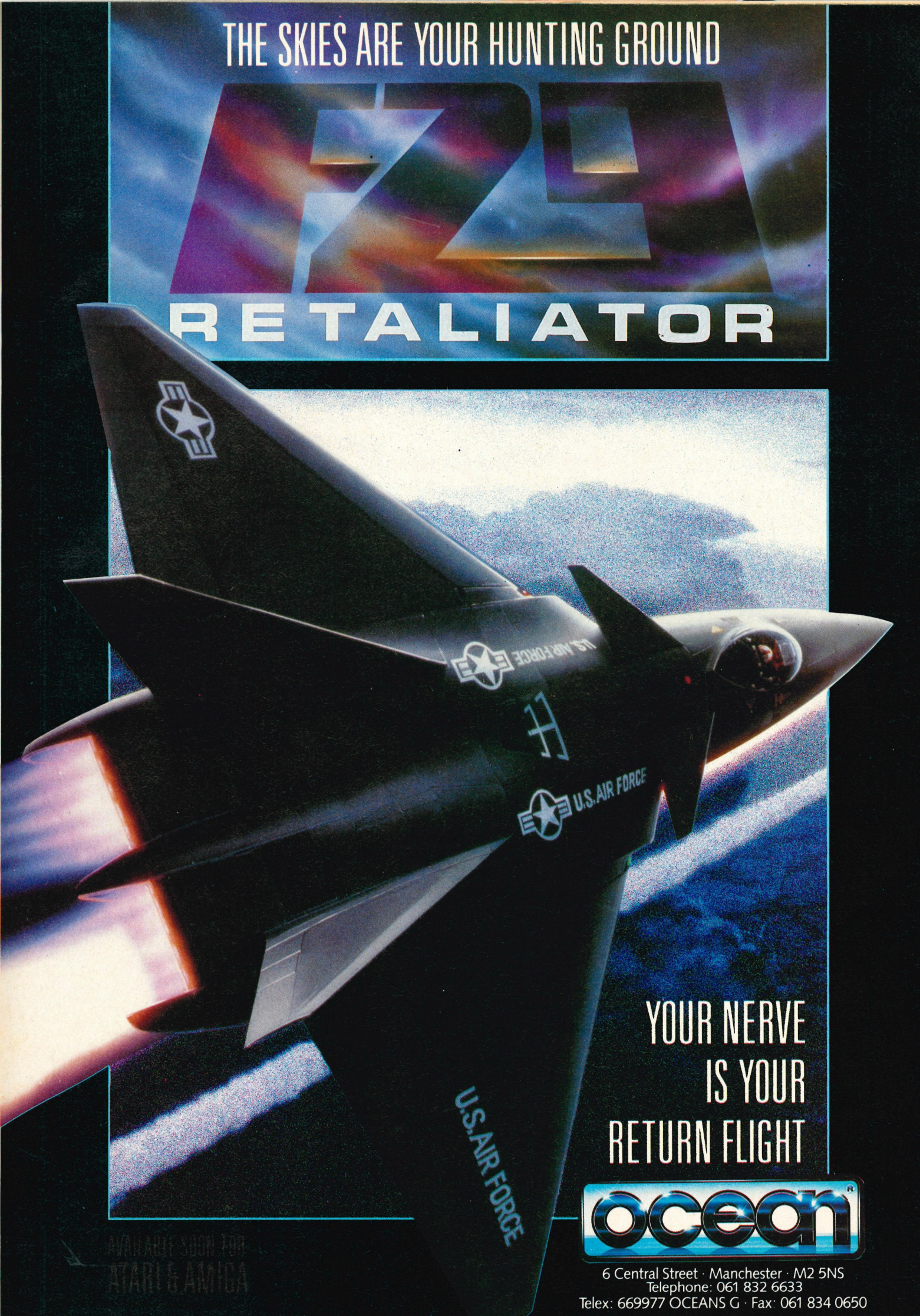
HEAVEN is a having powerful motorbike, the wind in your hair and no responsibilities – and, apart from the wind, *The Cycles* promises the lot. Similar in many ways to Accolade's car racing simulator, *Grand Prix Circuit*, *The Cycles* drops you straight into a full-scale world championship, contested across accurate

renditions of some of the world's leading circuits. You're not exactly in at the deep end though, as there are five levels of difficulty to choose from: the first offers an automatic steed and timid opposition, while you're left to your own devices in the fifth, changing gear, taking care of the engine and trying to get past some real aces. Each race takes an identical format: firstly you're given the luxury of an open track to put in a single solo lap (the time scored here determines your place on the starting grid), and then you take your place with the other contestants and wait for the lights to turn green. The number of laps per race is adjustable to suit your taste, and an optional scoreboard shows your fastest lap, position and lap number. The graphics are especially noteworthy, combining detailed machinery with fluid animation – and watch out especially for the sliding crash sequence. The tracks too are stunning, coming equipped with some of the most realistic hills and bumps yet experienced in a driving game – but unfortunately the package is let down by the lack of speed. If your bike had appeared to really shift, then this would have been a must. Let's hope that someone, somewhere can combine the kind of detail displayed here with some more realistic action – I for one can't wait for them to get it together.

★★★

Ciarán Brennan

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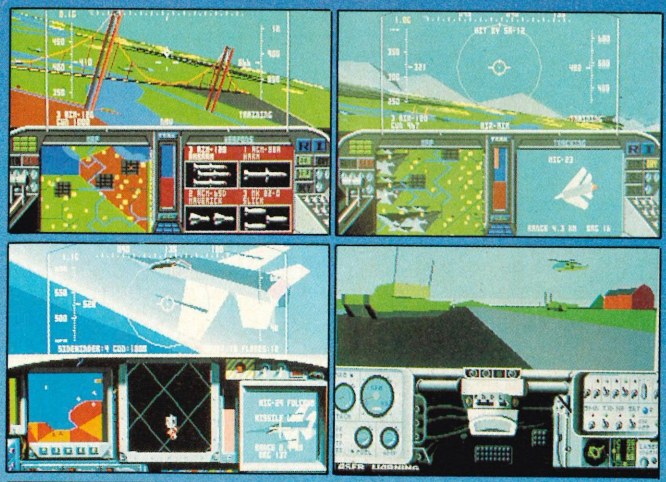

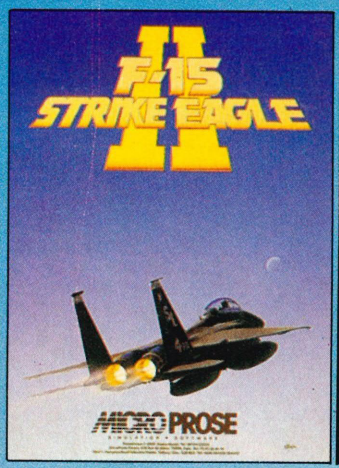

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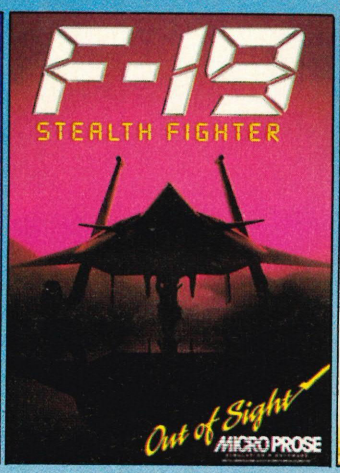

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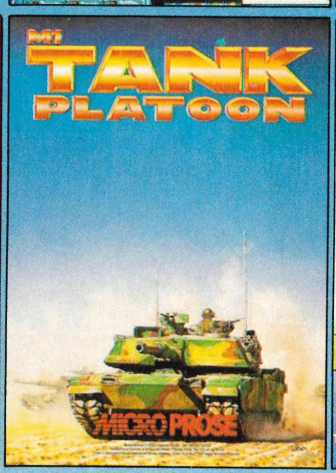

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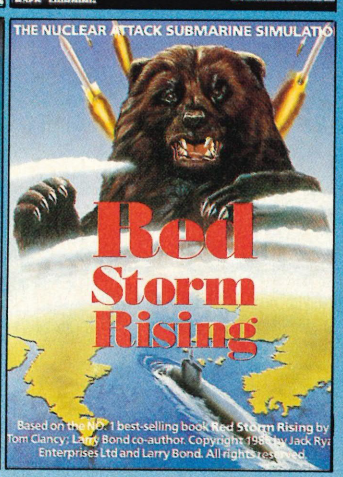

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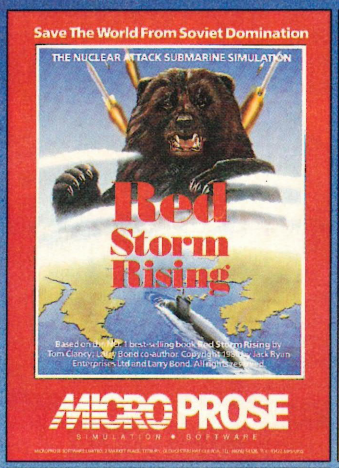
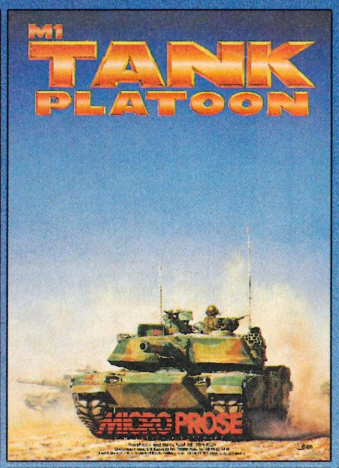
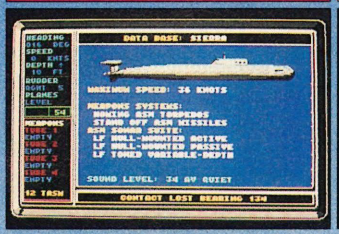


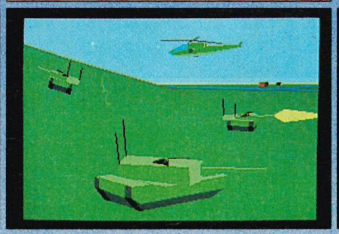


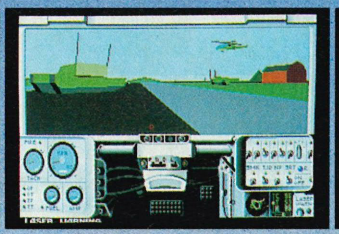
M1 Tank Platoon is the definitive simulation of armoured land combat. US tank platoons have four M1s. Four soldiers operate each tank. That's four tanks, sixteen men. And you control the whole shooting match. 16,000 acres of rolling, superb 3D terrain allows you to hide your tanks behind hills and ridges, just as a real tank commander would. Give orders to your entire platoon or to individual tanks. Lay down some heavy artillery or mortar fire before advancing your main tanks, or possibly call in air support in the form of A10 Tankbusters or AH64 Gunships. Defend yourself against attack from the air by strategically positioning anti-aircraft batteries. The strategic permutations are endless!

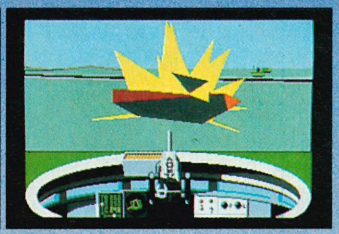
With thousands of battlefields and millions of situations, there is infinite variation within the game. With varied skill levels allowing veteran tank commanders, take on single battles or wage war from start to finish.

M1 Tank Platoon. All the action of armoured land combat. Available for IBM PC and Compatibles £39.95.









RED STORM RISING

This high technology simulator of strategy & tactics is based on the International best seller by Tom Clancy.

Working with the authors, MicroProse have brought the book's intense action and excitement to your computer screen. You are put in command of an American nuclear attack submarine at a time when 2 super powers collide. Available for C64 £14.95 cassette, £19.95 disk, Atari ST £24.95, IBM PC Compatibles £24.95 . . . "AWESOME" (CCI)

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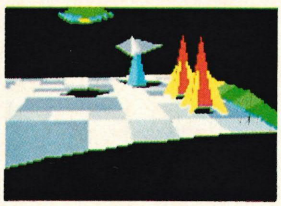
VIRUS

Firebird: (0666) 504326
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Hercules □
Mouse ■ Joystick □

IT'S NOT often a game appears that is 100% original – and a game that's 100% enjoyable is even rarer... but *Virus* fits snugly into both categories. It's an all-action arcade-style shoot-out, spiced with the occasional trace of strategy. *Virus* sees you as the sole defender of a group of farm islands under attack by a race of aliens who are spraying a deadly red dust to blight your crops. Flying an armed hoverplane attack craft (which resembles an elongated pyramid), your mission is to destroy the alien attack force. What makes this stand out from the crowd is the unusual perspective. The whole world, and everything in it, is displayed across three dimensions instead of two, so the player is able to fly 'in' and 'out' of the screen as well as just up, down and around. The aliens attack in a variety of machines: some are used to spread the deadly red blight, while others give air support to the attack. Combat is carried out in classic aerial dog-fighting style, with the extra dimension adding... well, an extra dimension really. At first the control mode is tricky to get to grips with, but once it's mastered it's very instinctive, and both flying and combat are a joy. *Virus* is in a class of its own, and anybody serious about PC gaming can't afford to miss it.



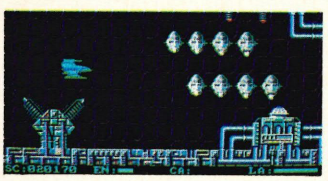
★★★★★
Gary Penn

LICENCE TO KILL

Domark: (01) 780 2222
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

DOUBLE-oh-seven takes his one-man espionage show to your monitor in a game that closely follows the plot of this Summer's cinematic blockbuster. Sacked from the Secret Service, Jimmy is out to avenge the murder of his best friend's wife at the hands of the evil Columbian drug dealer Sanchez. Five different styles of game stand between Bond and a confrontation with the drug baron, with the completion of one section leading to the next. Helicopters, trucks, planes and even foot power feature prominently in the action, which is representative of that found in any Bond film. This is an accurate and attractive adaptation of the movie, but it's more often than not too difficult for anyone other than the most deft player – which is frustrating enough, but more so because the earlier sections are tougher than the last!

★★★
Gary Whitta

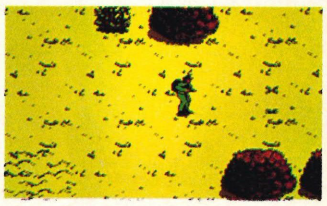


MENACE

Psygnosis: (051) 709 5755
£24.95
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA □ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

STRAP yourself in, take a firm grasp of your joystick and prepare to destroy the planet Draconia by tackling hordes of death-spitting alien enemies over six levels of finger-numbing action, which won't overtax your brain cells. The opening scenes are deceptively easy, but they do serve to prepare you for what's to come, as the later levels contain enough hardware to knock the stuffing out of the most hardened arcade addict! For sheer mindless arcade action, there's little to top *Menace* – it's fast, easy to get into and has just the right level of difficulty. Graphically it's a treat, but unfortunately CGA owners aren't catered for – and if you don't already have a joystick, Menace may be just the excuse you need to make that purchase as the keyboard layout is a little confusing and there's no way to change it.

★★★★
Gary Whitta



AIRBORNE RANGER

Microprose: (0666) 504326
£24.95
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

BEST known for its vast range of quality flight simulators, Microprose's first venture into the less familiar realm of shooting action places you in the earth-bound role of an infantryman. The object is to earn promotion, commendations and decorations by completing a number of dangerous missions behind enemy lines. Select your mission, tool up for the job (weapons available include automatic rifles, LAW rockets, hand grenades and time bombs) and parachute into the target area. The scenarios vary greatly, but the missions' practicalities don't change much – get in, get to the objective and get out alive. *Airborne Ranger* is certain to appeal to anyone who needs to scratch more than an itchy trigger finger.

★★★
Gary Whitta

WORLD DARTS

16-Blitz: (01) 727 8070
£4.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

ONE HUNDRED and eighty! Prepare to shout yourself hoarse and quaff a few gallons of ale, as 16-Blitz brings its own brand of 'arrows' antics from the local to your sitting room. The game

BARBARIAN: THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR/THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD

Palace Software: (01) 278 0751
£29.95
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA □ VGA □ Hercules □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

THESE days, it's not only your mother who's tempted to 'buy one, get one free' – as here's a perky pair of programs packed together and sold as one. The first pumps up your pecs, grows your hair to shoulder length and sends you on a mission to rescue the Princess Mariana. It's sweaty stuff indeed, as the swordplay necessary to complete this mission is as close to the real thing as you're likely to get without actually drawing blood. An abundance of rewarding moves are there to be used, from a satisfying head-butt through an assortment of slashes and sweeps (the head-lopping spin is difficult to get to grips with, but it's soooo satisfying). And you'll need them all, as all fights here

are fought to their logical conclusion – death – whether your opponent is human or one of the seven increasingly aggressive and skillful computer-controlled warriors. The second half of this mini-compilation unfolds in a post-holocaust setting, where aliens rule over an almost Neanderthal human race. From this oppressed band of knuckle-draggers emerges a hero, Tal, who sets out to overthrow his world's oppressors by running and jumping around a forest and throwing rocks at an assortment of mutated beings. Actually there's a little more to it than that, as Tal's ultimate objective is to find a long-lost anti-radiation suit (the 'sacred armour' of the title) and use it to overthrow his enemy. The mental challenge is minimal, which is unfortunate as the few puzzles present provide suitable accompaniment to the playable but otherwise repetitious platform-orientated action. There's sufficient short-term enjoyment to be had here, but it's Barbarian that gives this double-edged pack the winning cut.

★★★★

Gary Whitta

needs little explanation, except to say that a floating hand moves across the board under the control of your keyboard (well, almost) and you have only 10 seconds to unleash each shot or the computer does it for you – no matter where your hand is. Both single and two-player games are catered for (with a corresponding increase in the fun factor when more than one human's involved), with six different opponents available for the soloist. It would been nice to have a little sampled Sid Waddell ("the treble-twenty's like a cornfield on fay-eh!"), or even some digitised Jocky Wilson, but even without them *World Darts* is a surprising amount of fun – and all for under a fiver!

★★★★

Ciarán Brennan

SPEEDBALL

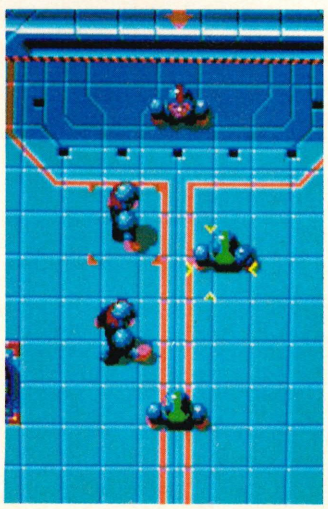
Image Works: (01) 928 1454
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

A SPORT designed for mankind's violent future, *Speedball* is a cross between football, basketball and all-out war. Contested by two teams of five in a metallic arena, the object is to get a metal ball into your opponent's goal more often than he returns the compliment – and it doesn't matter how you do it!

No-holds-barred physical action is enhanced by the random appearance of tokens which affect the action in your favour (for example, temporarily freezing the opposition on the spot) and coins which are collected for use between games to buy extra time, strength and even goals! As the title would suggest, *Speedball* is best suited to fast machines as speed determines the playability. It's also best enjoyed with a joystick attached, as the keyboard system can take some time to master. Nevertheless, this is a first-rate action game that shouldn't be missed.

★★★★

Gary Whitta



Once upon a time there was a PC user...

ELECTRONIC ARTS®

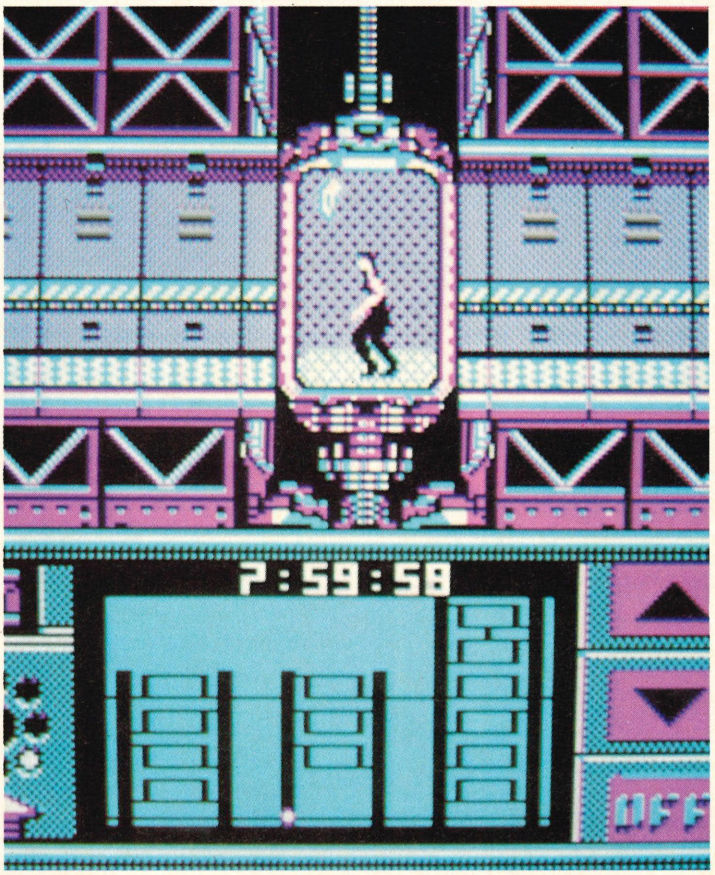
WORLD'S GREATEST II

Epyx: (021) 625 3388
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA □ VGA □ Hercules □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

SEVERAL compilations of back catalogue old timers have appeared in recent months – most providing plenty of variety and excellent value for money. Epyx's *The World's Greatest II* triple pack certainly does, comprising three Epyx 'names': *Impossible Mission II*, *World Games* and *Street Sports Basketball*. The fate of the world is in your hands in *Impossible Mission II*, as the evil Professor Elvin Atombender's missiles are ready to roll. Time is short, so you need a cool head, quick thinking and reactions to match as you run and somersault your way through eight platform-filled towers, attempting to collect pieces of code from furniture while avoiding lightning-launching robots. Phew! And from world domination to *World Games*... seven events from around the globe to test your hand-eye coordination to the full. There's Weightlifting from Russia, Barrel Jumping from Austria, Cliff Diving from Acapulco, Log Rolling from Canada, Bull Riding from the good ol' US of A, Caber Tossing from Scotland and finally Sumo Wrestling from Japan. All entertaining and demanding in their own right, and excellent fun as a whole. Finally, in a more flippant sports vein, *Street Sports Basketball* provides the opportunity to play basketball with a difference... official rules are all but forgotten as you play from a kid's point of view either in the playground, a back alley, a parking lot or the street. Unfortunately, the fact that the proceedings are displayed in CGA only means that it's difficult (sometimes impossible) to judge which player is which. Still, one weak link in an otherwise quality chain shouldn't make you think twice about buying it. Not even once.

★★★★

Gary Penn



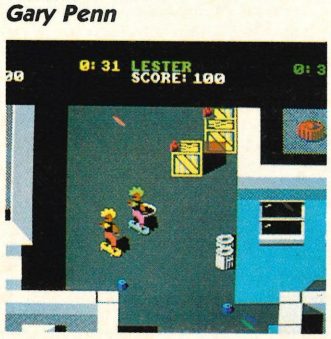
SKATE OR DIE

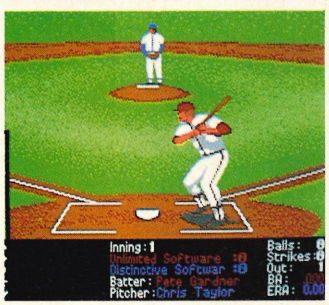
Electronic Arts: (0753) 46465
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

CAUGHT in a games trap? Well here's five sporting events with a radical difference – they're all skateboard based. *Skate Or Die* is similar in style to the Epyx Games series, in terms of presentation and playability. The package comprises freestyle ramp (like the half-pipe event in *California Games*), downhill race (against time), downhill jam (race against time and an opponent), pool joust (jousting on skateboards in an empty swimming pool), and a high jump. It's all quite crucial, although it must be said that only the racing events are packed full of fun – but that's not to say that the other three are empty.

★★★★

Gary Penn





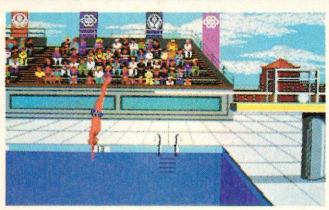
HARD BALL II

Accolade: (01) 585 3308
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

BELIEVE it or not, Hard Ball II is a sequel to Accolade's original best-selling baseball simulation, allowing one or two players to walk up to the plate and try their arms. All of the game's crucial elements are catered for: pitching, catching, batting, running, walking, tagging – you name it, and it's here. Using a multitude of statistics and options, the player can assume any position – even the manager's – in a contest taking place across seven different stadiums. If you're not already familiar with baseball, this will be a good introduction to America's favourite game – die-hard fans will find it compietely contagious.

★★★★

Brian Nesbitt



THE GAMES: SUMMER EDITION

US Gold: (021) 625 3388
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

HOW MUCH sport can a PC player take? Plenty, it seems, according to Epyx, who relentlessly pump out these irritatingly addictive simulations. This is the third collection of Summer games, would you believe, with archery, velodrome cycling, diving, hammer throwing, hurdles and pole vault out on the field, and rings and uneven parallel bars in the gymnasium. It's all breath-taking stuff – literally! Epyx Games compilations usually feature plenty of slick presentation sequences, but the company's surpassed itself here with it's most impressive front ends to date. Heavens, once you've indulged in this much armchair athleticism, you'll need to strap up your leg with a bandage.

★★★★

Paul Nicely

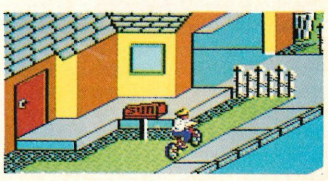
PAPERBOY

Elite: (0922) 55852
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

YOU WOULDN'T think that delivering newspapers would make suitable fodder for a computer game. But it does – or at least it did when Atari released an arcade game based on the exploits of an all-American teenager and his push-bike based deliveries. Your route is a street full of houses, with dogs, road workers, cars, joggers and similar suburban obstacles to avoid. Papers are thrown at everything and anything, and hopefully a few will make their way into the mail-boxes instead of damaging property. Elite's conversion has most of the features which made the arcade original such a joy to play – but there is one major flaw – the size of the screen. You can't see what's coming until your boy's lying dazed on the ground. Unless you have high-speed reactions, it's unlikely that this one will make the headlines.

★

Brian Nesbitt



"My PC is a business tool, not a toy, but when Susan gave me Battle Chess and Ferrari Formula One, well, I had to give them a go, didn't I?"

"Those games were so realistic, that when I saw Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer 2.0 in my local dealer, and if the man who first broke the sound barrier helped design it, I thought, why not?"

"My boss is so impressed with all the hours I'm now putting in on my PC, he's asked me for a round of golf! I'm now going to learn how to beat him for a change, with World Tour Golf."

"Hold my calls, I'm busy. If I can just behead this hydra, untold treasure will be mine. As Keef the Thief I can become the new God-King!."

ELECTRONIC ARTS™

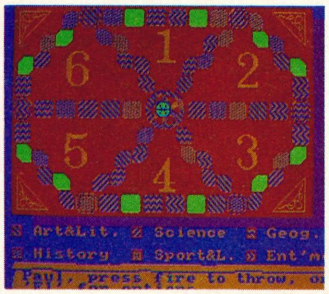
FIENDISH FREDDY'S BIG TOP O' FUN

Mindscape: (04486) 545
£34.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Hercules □
Joystick ■ Mouse □

ROLL UP, roll up and take your front row seat for the greatest show on earth – or at least a first-rate pastiche of the spectacular event that thrills children and adults alike. The game unfolds with a short animated sequence to set the scene: a Circus is in deep financial trouble, and unless it can produce enough money to pay off its debts by the end of tonight's performance, the whole caboodle is going to be unceremoniously bull-dozed. So it's all down to the fat Ringmaster (you) to organise a show good enough to keep the Big Top erect. However, there's an additional problem in the shape of Fiendish Freddy himself, a harmless-looking clown who's intent on wrecking the show and ruining the circus for good. Five suitably spectacular events await you: the high-wire, knife throwing, juggling, high dive and human cannonball. Success in each of these determines the amount of cash you make – the target is a whopping £10,000. At the end of each performance the panel of judges tots up all the marks from each act, and works out just how much the show is worth as a whole. While *Freddy*'s immediately enjoyable, mostly due to the hilarious sense of humour in the larger-than-life graphics, it ultimately fails because there are too few levels to present a lasting challenge.

★★★

Paul Presley



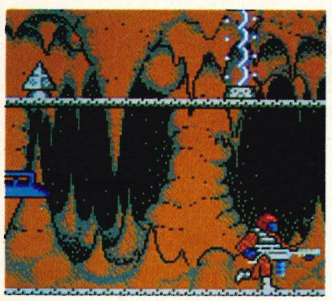
TRIVIAL PURSUIT

Domark: (01) 780 2222
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

THE BOARDGAME that racked a thousand brains and made a fortune for producer Horn Abbot is now available in computer form, complete with its own quizmaster. As you'd expect, the rules remain the same, but there are several twists in the tale: there are 3,000 new questions to get to grips with (including picture and sound teasers), a variety of options and, most innovative, TP – the game's compere and question master. TP throws the dice, declares the state of play (along with a few remarks of his own) and asks the questions from the comfort of his front room. In fact, this cheeky little chappie is probably the only thing that would make anyone lug the PC onto the coffee table and load this up, especially if the board game is near to hand. *Trivial Pursuit* is a competent rendition of the original, and (along with a Psion Organiser) is a pretty logical purchase for a PC-owning yuppie.

★★★

Gary Whitta



BAAL

Psygnosis: (051) 709 5755
£24.95
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

SLIP into your pressure suit, strap on your laser cannon and beam into *Baal*, a mix of arcade action and exploration set in a cave-like domain. Your job is to kill the demonic Baal – and then get the hell out. Baal's domain is split into three sectors, movement between them is achieved via the abundant platforms, walkways and ladders or – less frequently – by use of a rocket pack. Along the way you'll meet up with Baal's mutated and none-too-friendly minions – get them before they get you. To make matters worse, there are puzzles aplenty to be solved, like shutting off the laser beams that block off parts of the level. While it's an admirable effort, *Baal* doesn't really work. The idea of combining arcade action and puzzle-solving is a nice one, but there's not really enough of each element to satisfy. Instead the mix is uneasy, and as such it's unlikely to impress.

★★

Gary Whitta

CALIFORNIA GAMES

US Gold: (021) 625 3388
£19.99
5¼ ■ 3½ ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

HERE'S a collection of six sporting events based on pastimes pursued by Californians. It's a chance to demonstrate your skateboarding skills on a half-pipe, juggle and perform tricks with a hackeysack, ride a BMX bike over lengthy and rough terrain, roller skate along a hazard-laden boardwalk, catch and utilise those big breakers on your surfboard, and finally throw and catch a Frisbee. It's slick summer fun for all the family – the combination of comic touches (the occasional earthquake when playing the half-pipe outside Hollywood) and innovative control techniques make *California Games* one for the collection. At very least it'll save you a trip to the airport.

★★★★

Gary Penn

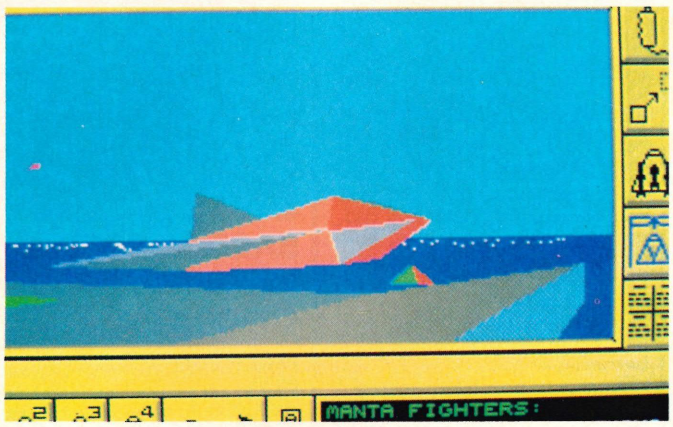
WIZBALL

Ocean: (061) 832 6633
£19.95
5¼ ■ 3½ ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

SOMETIMES people go to great lengths to ensure the unhappiness of others. In *Wizball*, an evil being has stolen all the colour from Wizworld, and it's up to you, a novice wizard, to put it all back. With your cat Nifta in tow, you bounce around eight inter-linked landscapes in a protective ball, shooting aliens and collecting colour droplets. One of *Wizball*'s many innovative features is its control mode, which takes time to learn but is ultimately rewarding. However, it does have one major flaw – and that's speed. fast PCs more often than not enhance the enjoyment of games (this is certainly true of flight simulations), but unless you have an early hamster-driven model, *Wizball* is just too fast to be playable – a case of playing in haste and repenting at your leisure, really.

★★

Brian Nesbitt



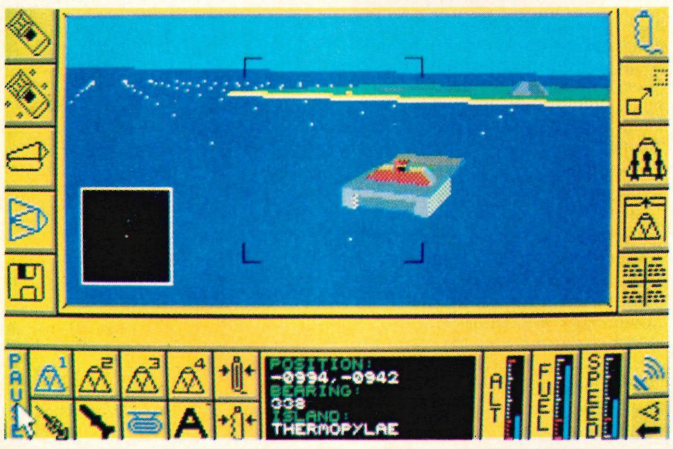
CARRIER COMMAND

Rainbird: (0666) 504326
£34.99
5¼ ■ 3½ ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Hercules ■
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

DATELINE: June 4th 2166. The Commander of the ACC Epsilon is informed that his sister ship, the ACC Omega has been taken over by the STANZA organisation. As part of a fiendish world domination plot, STANZA plans to use the rogue carrier to destroy a series of 64 volcanic islands and thus cause major damage to the world's economy which now depends on the islands for its fuel resources. As Commander of the Epsilon, you've got 24 hours to somehow take control of the island chain before your enemy gets there first. But there's more to this than simply finding and destroying another ship – materials have to be found, processed and moved from island to island to keep the Epsilon stocked and fuelled. Carrier control is divided in four: ship control, defence, Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV) control and Manta aircraft control – with each section containing its own sub-elements. By switching between a combination of all of these, the ship is navigated, repaired, restocked and defended, while more experienced players can launch long-range island attacks and – ultimately – go in search of the opposition for a head-on showdown. The 24-hour time limit is real (you've got that much time to achieve your mission) but the save game and speed-up options should stop you burning too much midnight oil – and besides it will probably take quite a few attempts before you take your first island, let alone begin to conquer a chain. Also, you'll no doubt spend your first few attempts marvelling at the amazing 'reality' of the world – send an AAV towards an island, then launch a Manta from the flight deck and watch from the air as the amphibious craft heads towards its target. Eventually you'll begin to take this complexity for granted, controlling multiple vehicles, devising intricate strategies and watching your back simultaneously. *Carrier Command*'s world isn't one that should be entered lightly, as once you're in there you'll find it very difficult to leave.

★★★★★

Ciaran Brennan



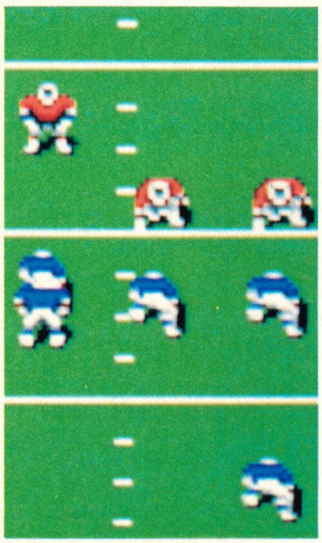
JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL

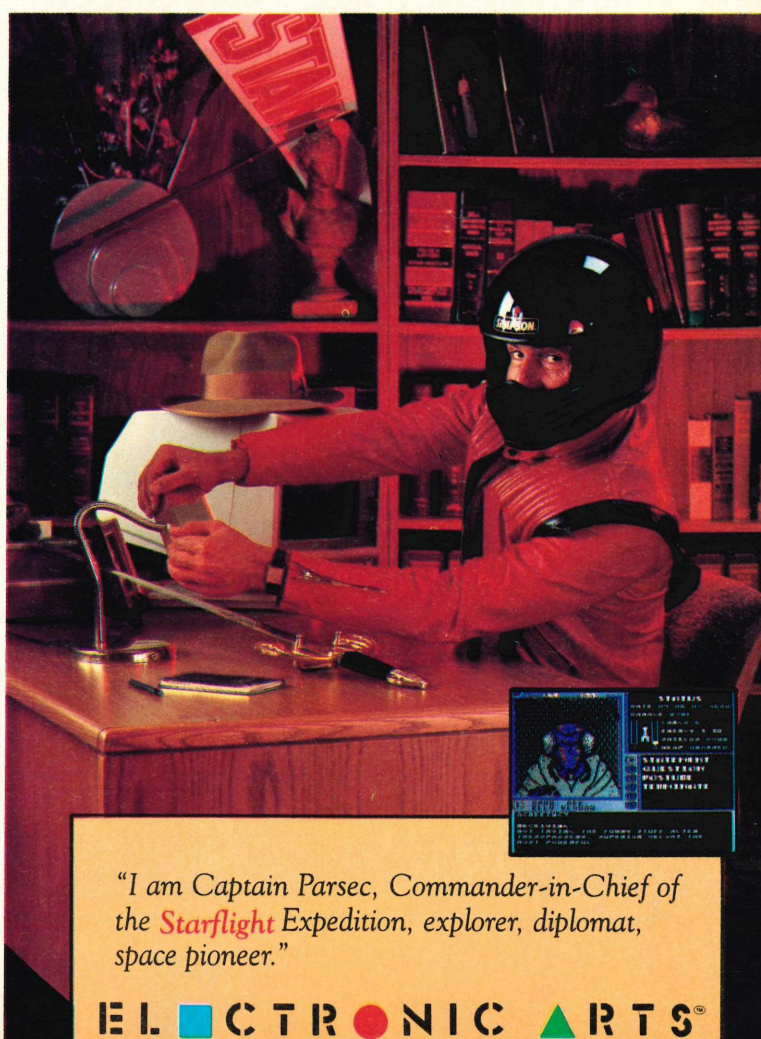
Electronic Arts: (0453) 46465
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" □
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □
Hercules □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

DEVELOPED with the help of the eponymous US Coach, *JMF* is a text and action simulation of America's favourite sport. The emphasis here is on strategy – just about every statistic relevant to the game plays a part – and there's almost no end to the options and 'plays' available. Strategies are devised on a chalkboard before taking to the gridiron, players are shuffled around according to their strengths and weaknesses, and entire teams can be created from scratch and played in a league. It's possible to alter plays during the game (or to take direct control of any player on the pitch), but if you prefer to remain on the coach's bench, all the players have their own intelligence (unlike the real thing, of course). Substitutions, interceptions, customised plays, pitch conditions and statistics based on real NFL players are all featured to further enhance the authentic feel. However, what may put many armchair John Madden's off is the massive depth: however you play, it's necessary to wade through a stream of daunting statistics and complex data – hence the 60–page manual. For die-hard followers of the sport willing to spend plenty of time with the game, *John Madden Football* could be the best thing since shoulder pads, but the less technically minded may be better off waiting for Cinemaware's *TV Sports Football*.

★★★

Paul Presley

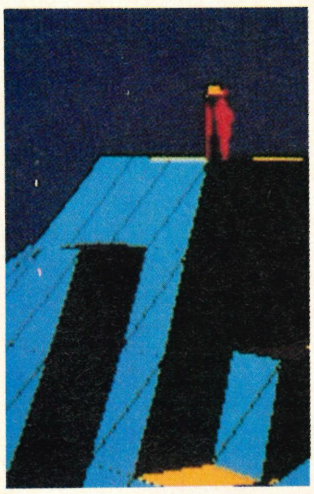




THE SENTINEL

Firebird: (0666) 504326
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Hercules □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

EVERY so often, along comes a computer game which refuses to sit snugly into one of the more traditional categories. *The Sentinel* is such a game. It's almost impossible to describe, but it's almost a version of the old playground favourite, King Of The Castle. Remember? Someone was the King and the rest of you had to knock him off his perch. If you were seen to move, you were 'out' – but of course, while the King's back is turned to spot you, someone else can move in. In The Sentinel, there's no-one else to help you out – in fact, the odds are stacked against you as King (the Sentinel) has support in the form of Sentries (which, unlike the Sentinel, can't turn to spy on you). Fortunately, the playing area isn't as flat as a tarmac playground. In fact, there are 10,000 different, progressively difficult contoured chequerboard landscapes to conquer. Of course, things aren't so simple – the Sentinel sits atop a plinth at the highest point on the landscape, and you start at the lowest. You can't move... physically. The only way to get about is to create an empty shell and 'jump' into it. Placing boulders beneath the shell raises your height, allowing you to ascend towards your prey, but you can't build anything if; a) you can't see the base of the square on which you wish to place the object, and; b) you don't have enough energy. Extra energy is gained by absorbing the trees and boulders dotted around each landscape. Get high enough to see the Sentinel's square and you can absorb it, occupy its slot and hyperspace to the next world... and so it goes on. But no short description could ever do this masterful game justice – *The Sentinel*'s unique gameplay is more addictive and compelling than any 'soap'. A classic.



★★★★★
Gary Penn

PIRATES!

Microprose: (0666) 504326
£24.95
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

SET IN the 17th Century, *Pirates* gives you the chance to put on a pair of knee-high boots and find out just how well you would have fared as a sea-faring outlaw at the height of the bucaneering era. It's a mix of strategy, management and swashbuckling action that sets you the task of becoming as rich and as influential as possible – without paying too much attention to the law. There's a hefty manual to be read before play starts, but once you've set sail it's not long before your lust for money and power takes you off the straight and narrow. Battles are fought on both the high seas and inland, with fencing playing a major part in both. Basic seamanship and navigation is also necessary if you don't wish to sail around in circles for half the game looking for the Spanish Main. There's a lot of depth to the strategy here – especially in the battle sequences – and so it's not the sort of game you can come to grips with in the space of an hour or so. But if you've got plenty of patience, a good strategic mind and a love of Errol Flynn movies, you won't go far wrong.

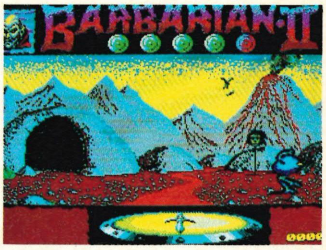
★★★
Gary Whitta

NEBULUS

Hewson: (0235) 832 939
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

PREPARE to demolish 16 towers in a game that sports one of the most original concepts that you're ever likely to see. The revolving constructions are brought down by guiding Pogo the frog-like demolition expert to the top, jumping from platform to platform while avoiding bizarre beings along the way – without getting knocked into the water below. With a tower toppled, Pogo travels to the next in his submarine, which gives you the chance to shoot a few fish (!) for bonus points. It's not dextral demands all the way though, as you put your brain in gear to figure out how to negotiate seemingly impossible spots. *Nebulus* is refreshingly different, compulsive, frustrating but ultimately rewarding.

★★★★
Brian Nesbitt



BARBARIAN II: THE DUNGEONS OF DRAX

Palace Software: (01) 278 0751
£29.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA □ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

FOLLOWING his defeat in the original *Barbarian* (see page 39), the despicable Drax is back and intent on world domination. This time around though, his adversary is either an axe-wielding beefcake or a sword-bearing Maria Whittaker lump-alike. Whichever you choose to be, three maze-like scenes stand between you and the sorceror, with items to collect and an abundance of bizarre beings to do battle with. *The Dungeons Of Drax* is more exploration-orientated than its predecessor and is less interesting in the long term because of this. The prospect of fighting a variety of different creatures instead of just another human is welcome, even if the actual battles are limited by insufficient moves and a lack of opposition variety or intelligence in behaviour. Still, there's fun to be had, and the sound is put to surprisingly good use, with varying durations and pitches of bleep representing everything from screams to hits.

★★★
Brian Nesbitt

STAR COMMAND

SSI: (021) 625 3388
£34.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick □

SSI HAS a high reputation among strategy/role-playing enthusiasts, most noticeably because of its recent success with the *Avanced Dungeons And Dragons* series. And this reputation won't be damaged by its latest, *Star Command*. Taking command of a eight-strong squad, it's your job to

complete the series of missions dictated by the Star Command: the missions start as simple delivery jobs and small pirate eliminations and eventually go as high as saving the universe from destruction. Your squad is created by choosing each character from one of four classes and then training them for eight years. Each new group is given a financial budget with which to buy their ships and equipment, with extra money awarded on the successful completeion of missions. But it's mostly the well implemented control method (especially apparent in the combat sequences) that makes *Star Command* one of the more accessible and enjoyable Role-Players to date.

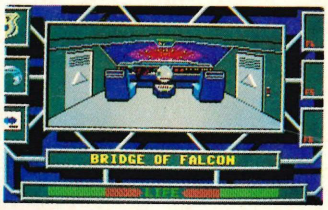
★★★★

Paul Presley

OMNICRON CONSPIRACY

First Star: (01) 928 1454
£34.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

WHEN an agent on the trail of a drugs ring goes missing and a usually reliable interplanetary space freighter turns up as a deserted space hulk, there's only one man to sort things out – Captain Ace Powers. Ace is controlled by a cursor and menu system, which is alright as far as it goes, but it can be frustrating when you to try to manipulate everything on the screen only to find that most of it is purely decorational. That said, *Omnicron* scores points with its plot: it's humourous without being silly,



clever without being unnecessarily complicated and intriguing without being frustrating. It may not be to everyone's taste, but *Omnicron Conspiracy* is excellent fare for avid adventurers and explorers.

★★★★

Paul Presley

THE GAMES: WINTER EDITION

US Gold: (021) 625 3388
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5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick □

NICE idea, shame about the games. While the prospect of competing in seven wintry events has potential, the end result lacks the class of other Epyx *Games* releases. Speed down an solid ice track on a tiny toboggan and show off your figure and speed skating skills. Or brave tortuous downhill and slalom ski courses – 'fly Eddie, fly' from a giant ski jump or watch your prospects freeze on the cross country ski course: it all sounds like frozen fun, but the gameplay lacks polish. Epyx's sports simulations are usually pedigree animals. Unfortunately this one's a bit of a dog.

★★

Brian Nesbitt

GAUNTLET

US Gold: (021) 625 3388
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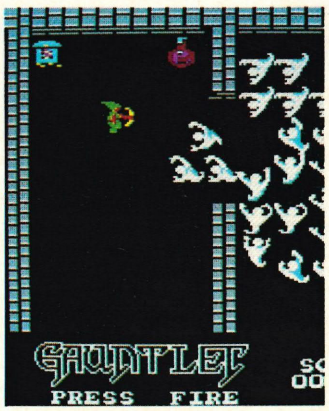
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA □ Herc □
Mouse □ Joystick ■

NO-ONE could ever accuse arcade giant Atari of being unoriginal. Not only has the company managed to produce entertaining games based on such mundane subjects as delivering newspapers, it was also the first to create an astoundingly successful blend of good old-fashioned fighting action with a Role-Playing scenario. *Gauntlet* offers you the opportunity to



become one of four characters (including Thor the barbarian and Merlin the wizard), each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses – some are quick, others are strong and so on. Up to two players battle their way through dozens of maze-like dungeons, avoiding or destroying the deadly denizens (including ghosts and other ghoulish beings), negotiating locked doors and traps, and collecting keys and treasure. The simplistic exploration and shooting adventure is great fun, but the going's best enjoyed with a second player.

★★★★

Brian Nesbitt

CHESSMASTER 2100

The Software Toolworks: (04486) 545
£24.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Herc □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

ONE GAME that has appeared more times on a computer than any other is chess, and The Software Toolworks is no stranger to the genre as this is the second release in its *Chessmaster* series. Here, a comprehensive menu system allows standard features such as game hints, move timers, skill levels and board set-ups, as well as some not-so-standard features including a tutorial, comparisons to famous moves, displays of all possible legal moves at the current time and a display of the moves needed to get checkmate. How well does it play the game though? *CM2100* has a vast library of 110 classic chess games and utilises the masters' moves to their full extent. Don't be put off though, you can also set it at an introductory mode to make things easier. This is the most sophisticated chess game yet seen on the PC and is worth every penny for any would-be grandmaster.

★★★★★

Paul Presley

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

Lucasfilm: (021) 625 3388
£29.99
5¼" ■ 3½" ■
CGA ■ EGA ■ VGA ■ Hercules □
Mouse ■ Joystick ■

THE THIRD and final film in George Lucas and Steven Spielberg's immensely popular series has spawned one of the most entertaining computer games of all time. Cast as the adventurous archaeologist, you find yourself in a race against time to find the legendary Holy Grail before Hitler's hordes can get their hands on it. The game is described as a 'Graphic Adventure' and that's precisely what it is – text commands such as 'Open Door' and 'Use Whip' are entered (although they don't need to be typed in – sentences are put together by selecting and linking key phrases and words from a menu). The results are played out – movie style – on the action area above. The movie's plot is followed fairly closely, but extra locations, characters and puzzles have been added – so even if you've seen the film there's still no guarantee that you'll be able to complete the game. The myriad of puzzles range from the obvious to the cryptic, and are well graded so that the tougher puzzles don't come into play until late on in the game. Whether you've got experience in adventures, or you've yet to come across one, *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* comes heartily recommended – it's easily the best game of its type to date.

★★★★★

Brian Nesbitt

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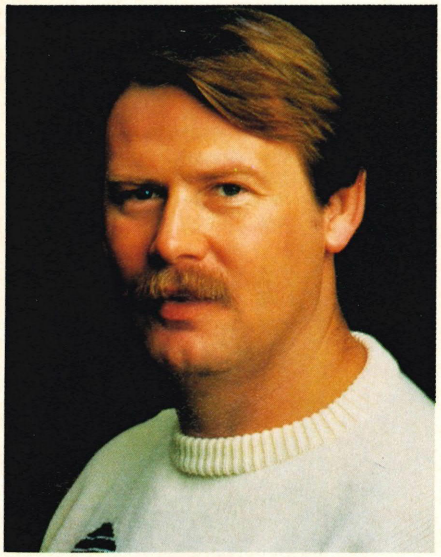

Sierra On-Line may not have been around forever, but it sure seems that way... John Minson talks to the top US company's boss, Ken Williams, and finds that there's more to adventure games than wizards and trolls — and more to Sierra than adventure games.

QUEST FOR ADVENTURE

In home computing terms, 10 years ago is pre-history. An era prior to the PC, even before the Sinclair ZX80. An age of kits built by electronics hobbyists, Commodore's PET and a few early Apples in wooden crates. Hardly the ideal time to start a games software publishing company.

In 1979 Ken Williams was working with mainframes, a 'techie' developing programs from his home terminal. When Ken wasn't deep in business, his wife Roberta would play an adventure called, with startling originality, *Adventure*. And lo, one day she turned to Ken and said the fateful words . . . "I think we could do better than this."

So Roberta designed and Ken coded and the result was *Mystery House*, a whodunnit set in a spooky mansion. The rest, as they say, is gamesplaying history.

Mystery House had one obvious advantage over *Adventure* — it had graphics. Monochrome line graphics admittedly, but as Ken explains there wasn't much room for elaborate shading when an Apple II floppy only held around 100K and most machines had minimal amounts of RAM. But though the style was restricted by technology, the content was just what the doctor ordered to keep the Apple at play.

Ken and Roberta first had to overcome another problem though. Because there was no leisure software industry, there was no leisure software distribution network. But as ardent adventurers, the Williams didn't let that hamper their quest — together with games producers Synergistic and Scott Adams Adventures they formed their own distribution business, which was eventually sold and became a leading business software distributor, Softsel.

The next great step for Sierra came with the addition of animation to their programs. And unlikely as it may sound, much of the development of the first animated game, *Kings Quest*, was funded by IBM.

Big Blue playing games? Sounds odd, but the world's largest computer manufacturer's reasons were far from trivial. As Ken explains: "In 1981 or 2, IBM approached us and said they were coming out with the PC Jr, which was still called the Peanut at that stage. It was going to have 16 colour capability, three-channel music, 512K of memory and they wanted something to really push it. Now if you're making a new micro targetted at the home market it makes sense to have a game to show it off."

IBM was helping Sierra as much as it was promoting its own products though. The original *King's Quest* continues to sell well after six years, spawning a series of sequels (work on number five is underway), all combining the expert storytelling of Roberta Williams with constantly improving game techniques. So far the game has sold over 1,200,000 units, which at £50 per copy means it's grossed almost as much as the *Batman — The Movie*!

Ironically though, the game was almost killed before birth. The Williams had installed an aggressive management team which saw the future in consoles and wanted Sierra to concentrate on cartridge games for the Atari and its ilk. "They had decided to get out of computer games, so *King's Quest* was kind of treated like an unwanted product. But Roberta thought that consoles would be a fiasco — and she was right and they were wrong."

"When a game costs from £300,000 to £500,000 to develop, you're very careful who you commission."

HARD TIMES

But there were still bad times ahead. Sierra had grown considerably since its 'kitchen table' origins, eventually employing a staff of 135. Then the years of 1984 and '85 saw a serious slump in the computing industry and Sierra was forced to cut its staff to just 40.

Consistent quality saved the day however, as Roberta continued with the *King's Quest* series (as well as developing children's games like *Mixed-Up Mother Goose*), while other designers created universes of their own: Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy declared 'star wars' with their *Space Quest* series; ex-police officer Jim Walls set off on a *Police Quest*; and Al Lowe and Mark Crowe proved that everybody loves a loser with the *Leisure Suit Larry* games.

With animated adventures covering almost every topic imaginable, you'd wonder whether Sierra isn't just grabbing people off the street to come up with new ideas. Not so, says Ken Williams. "When a game costs from £300,000 to £500,000 to develop, you're very careful who you commission.

"Next year we expect to spend a million dollars on *King's Quest V*. It's really like making a movie, as we employ a composer, scriptwriters and even actors for the voice-overs. Nobody would risk that amount of money on an unknown, so now you can only be a game designer by working on a program and demonstrating your ability for great music or graphics."

Even with nine designers currently working for the company, Sierra only intends to release seven to nine titles per year, to maintain their quality. Ken also says that they'll continue to concentrate on series which cover all the bases: "*Leisure Suit Larry* and *Police Quest* are for adults, *Hero's Quest* suits the role players; and *Codename: Iceman* will suit the simulation enthusiasts. But you've got to force yourself to innovate."

Development is more than a question of money though. As Sierra's games get more complex, the various tasks involved in creating them become more specialised. Music and sound effects are now too diverse to be handled by one person; similarly, still graphics and animation are separate areas. To help the experts interface their talents without having to understand all the other departments, Sierra has developed a highly sophisticated development system.

"It recognises that there are specialists in the development process and it breaks it into lots of pieces so that they don't get in each others' way," says Ken. "The game designers don't have to worry what computer they're working for either. I wouldn't say that it makes development easy, but it allows it to progress with highly talented people in each category.

"Ultimately I think we'll be doing games with TV quality graphics. I want people to become

emotionally involved in the games and you must have realistic graphics and sound for that."

Sound is a prime concern of the company. Film composer William Goldstein has supplied the soundtrack for *King's Quest IV*; Supertramp's Bob Siebenberg helped *Space Quest III*'s audio to take off. To make the most of their musical efforts you'll require a Roland MT-32, Ad Lib or IBM music card. As Ken says: "You can't listen to a beep and become emotionally involved."

HURRAY FOR HOLLYWOOD

Goldstein isn't the only Hollywood talent working for Sierra. The forthcoming *King Arthur and the Search for the Grail* is being designed by film and television writer Christy Marks. The resulting scenario has the player battling the Black Knight, pitting his or her wits against Merlin and travelling from Glastonbury to the Mediterranean in a mixture of Celtic myth and British history.

Hero's Quest will take a different approach to swords and sorcery. In the early eighties, Sierra introduced the first *Ultima* game – long before Lord British formed Origin to continue the seminal role playing series. And although role playing has since prospered, Ken Williams believes the genre is caught in a rut – and that *Hero's Quest* will change all that.

"It's much more fun than most. There's lots of personality to the characters, lots of animation and music. This is the first role playing game to say, let's go in a different direction from *Ultima* and *Wizardry*. It's more like *King's Quest*."

Another new departure is *Codename: Iceman*, the result of Ken's desire to produce a game that captured the thrills of novelists like best seller Tom Clancy, whose *Red Storm Rising* and *Hunt For Red October* have already been converted into computer games. Jim Walls, *Police Quest*'s author, has put his skills for vivid reality to work to combine an accurate submarine simulation with a playable espionage adventure.

If *Codename: Iceman* is the face of tomorrow's Sierra, another imminent release, *The Colonel's Bequest*, may cause deja vu among veteran gamers. "It's sort of a re-working of *Mystery House*, Roberta's first game. The original idea was just to re-release it, but now it's about 60 per cent *Mystery House* and 40 per cent new.

Breaking the male-domination of computer gaming is very important to Roberta Williams – therefore Laura Bow, heroine of *The Colonel's Bequest*, will take her place alongside Rosella in *King's Quest IV*. Set in the roaring 20's, Laura, a young college journalist, finds herself investigating a murder at the isolated plantation of Blood Bayou.

If this all sounds too heroic, lounge lizards everywhere will be overjoyed to here that Leisure Suit Larry is set to make his return with Polyester Patty in *Pursuit of the Pulsating Pectorals*. And anybody who felt mildly disappointed at *Larry II*'s somewhat sanitised tone will be relieved to know that Sierra's stepped up the smut again.

However, smut doesn't necessarily mean sexist. Having been dumped by his South Seas bride (who left him for another woman!), Larry decides to sort out his life again – but then half-way into this task, the player takes the role of Patty!!!

Ken reports that he was playing the game on his lap-top on a recent flight from Montreal when his presence was requested on the flight deck . . . so that the pilots could have a sneak preview of the new release.

With all this talk of interactive movies and TV quality graphics, I jokingly ask how long it will be before we see Larry on the silver screen. "Well, we've got two proposals from different film companies who want to do major film versions," says Ken – and he means it.

So could *Leisure Suit Larry* be the first computer game character to make it to Hollywood? The bytes boggle. But who could play him. Danny DeVito? Too fat? Arnold Schwarzenegger? Too much . . . hair. Dustin Hoffman? DUSTIN HOFFMAN!!! Boffo box office! But only if Meryl Streep co-stars as Polyester Patty.

"Ultimately I think we'll be doing games with TV quality graphics. I want people to become emotionally involved in the games and you must have realistic graphics and sound for that."

▶ Al Lowe: The man behind Larry, or the brains behind the leisure suit.

VENTURE FORTH

Sierra's adventures are a refinement of the traditional adventure, adding animated graphics so that you can see your character directly respond to your commands. Most require typed input (with notable exceptions, including *Manhunter* and *The Black Cauldron*) and all require varying degrees of deductive powers to investigate the locations. Some also include arcade sequences to test your reactions.

All of the titles include 3½" and 5¼" disks and are installable on your hard disk: indeed this is recommended for fast play. All support CGA, EGA, VGA and MCGA graphics and a few support other standards: but you'll want at least EGA to make the most of them. About half the games surveyed require 512K and 8Mhz is recommended, while the rest will run under 256K (we indicate which). Finally optional joysticks, and occasional mice, are catered for.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS
£24.99

256K. Graphics: + Hercules Mono. Mouse option.

The man with dress sense which pays homage to Saturday Night Fever has one thing on his mind . . . and it's not hair. The fortysomething single with receding follicles has dreams of hot tubs and pneumatic nifties. Unfortunately California's finest find his 100% man-made threads and 11 gold chains resistible. Can you help Larry avoid another night alone? More mildly smutty than corruptingly salacious, LSL provides a Kama Sutra of fun at the expense of would-be studs the world over. An hilarious classic, it was voted best adventure game of 1987 by the US Software Publishers Association.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY GOES LOOKING FOR LOVE (In Several Wrong Places)
£34.99

512K (640K on PC Jr): 8Mhz or faster recommended. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy. Mouse option. Supports Roland MT-32, Ad Lib or IBM music card.

Larry, the nerd who never grew up, is penniless again but a lucky lottery ticket and an encounter with a particularly dense bimbo on a Blind Date-style TV

show sets him off on a cruise with the airhead of his dreams. Suddenly Larry finds himself in demand . . . and he can't cope with the hot and cold running females. A game of infinitely lecherous possibilities (try looking at every woman you meet — you'll find Larry loves 'em all) and several side-splitting set-pieces such as the TV studio contest. You can even set the level of rudeness!

SPACE QUEST III: THE PIRATES OF PESTULON
£34.99

512K (640K on PC Jr): 8Mhz or faster recommended. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy. Mouse option. Supports Roland MT-32, Ad Lib or IBM music card.

Move over Luke Skywalker for Roger Wilco, intergalactic garbageman, as he hunts down the human trash who kidnapped Space Quest's creators, the two guys from Andromeda. Could it be the Pirates of Pestulon making pests of themselves? From a Labionian junkyard to intergalactic burger bars, the unique humour of Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy goes boldly beyond the frontiers of the previous quests. Possessors of music cards can enjoy over 30 minutes music created by Supertramp's Bob Siebenberg as they dodge Sludge Vohaul's goons — who want to make banana pudding of our hero!

KING'S QUEST IV: THE PERILS OF ROSELLA
£34.99

512K (640K on PC Jr): 8Mhz or faster recommended. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy. Mouse option. Supports Roland MT-32, Ad Lib or IBM music card.

Roberta Williams continues her epic quest with Princess Rosella in a desperate search for the charmed fruit that will save her father, King Graham, from certain death. She also has to find a magic talisman to save good fairy Genesta's life . . . and she only has one day to do it. The rural scenery is beautifully realised and inhabited with smoothly animated dwarves and unicorns. But there are also puzzles to satisfy the most stringent adventurer in this vast, 3Mb game, as day shifts into night. If this is your first encounter with King's Quest you'll be glad to know the previous adventures are available in a triple pack for just £34.99.

MANHUNTER NEW YORK
29.99

256K. Graphics: + Tandy; PC Jr.

If you ever saw the movie Escape From New York or television's V you'll know what to expect in this tale of the Big Apple, two years after an alien invasion. Hired by the conquerors to track down subversives, this is one of the few computer games that asks you to make a moral choice — whether to continue to follow orders as you discover the secrets of the alien orbs or switch alliegance to your fellow earthlings. Manhunter doesn't use text input but uses a cursor to click on map locations or objects you want to investigate. There are also arcade-style battles to test your reactions as well as wits.

MANHUNTER 2: SAN FRANCISCO
£34.99

256K. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy.

Switching coasts, the Manhunter saga continues as you set out once again with your portable Manhunter Assignment Device (MAD) computer to track down renegade humans. Why are the city's skyscrapers being buried? What are the red gasses emitted by Coit Tower? Why are San Franciscans vanishing? How long will you continue to work for the aliens? Once again the cursor command system, which avoids typing but some people find lacking in options, and arcade sequences add an extra dimension to the Sierra formula. A vivid, sometimes horrific sci-fi challenge in a realistically realised setting.

POLICE QUEST 2: THE VENGEANCE
£29.99

512K (640K on PC Jr): 8Mhz or faster recommended. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy. Mouse option. Supports Roland MT-32, Ad Lib Game Blaster or IBM music cards and other music synthesizers.

Expect to follow police procedure rigorously as ex-cop Jim Walls brings the Lytton PD to vivid life. From the stationhouse where you meet a Hill Street Blues bunch of colleagues to the mean streets of the city, Walls' experience really counts; you'll need to know the enclosed Homicide Officer's Guide if you're to complete a successful investigation. But even that won't help you stay alive with psychotic Jessie Bains, the Death Angel, out of jail and on your trail with just one thought in mind... revenge! Better not neglect that target practice before you leave the station. And be careful out there

GOLD RUSH
£29.99

256K. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy.

Yee-haw, it's boil up the beans and brew the black coffee for a tale of the Old West when the Rio was Grande. More than just an adventure, this historical simulation is accompanied by a guide to the gold rush and a map of California's mother lode and the accompanying areas. Go west, young man, and choose between a steamship to Panama then a treacherous trek through the jungles of Central America; overland excitement as castle rustlers, outlaws and Indians impede your progress; and the storm-tossed route around Cape Horn as scurvy, starvation and seasickness make you wish you'd stayed at home. A strategy adventure which richly portrays the dangers of this exciting period.

THE BLACK CAULDRON
£24.99

256K. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy.

Younger players — and anybody else who finds Sierra's full-scale adventures daunting — should enjoy this conversion of the Disney cartoon, which is completely controlled with the joystick meaning there's no need for typing text commands. As Taran you encounter 30 fully-animated characters and pass through 70 locations, as well as pitting your reactions against six arcade sequences and mazes. You can follow the plot of the film, which is retold in a beautifully illustrated, full-colour booklet, or more adventurous players will want to devise their own solution. A classic union of Sierra and Disney, both masters in their own fields.

AND THE REST . . .

Although Sierra's reputation is based on its adventures, recently the company has branched out into other areas, including card games and even fast action shoot 'em ups.

SILPHEED
£29.99

512K (not PC Jr). Graphics: + Tandy. Supports Roland MT-32, Ad Lib or IBM music card.

Anybody who believes you can't play arcade games on a PC only needs look at this super-fast Japanese shoot 'em up, where blasting alien ships could prove to be the ideal way to unwind after a particularly hectic day of spreadsheets and meetings. Fast, furious and exciting, you'll need a joystick to get the best out of this one.

HOYLE'S BOOK OF GAMES
£29.99

512K (640K on PC Jr): 8Mhz or faster recommended. Graphics: + Hercules Mono; Tandy. Mouse option. Supports Roland MT-32, Ad Lib, Game Blaster or IBM music card and other music synthesizers.

When it comes to cards there's only one ace — Edmond Hoyle, the early 18th century writer who laid down the basic rules for a spectrum of games. Of course there have been computerised card games before but Sierra's selection includes some rarities, such as Crazy 8's and Old Maid for youngsters. Others are Hearts, Cribbage, Gin Rummy and even Klondike Solitaire. For your opponents you can choose from such luminaries of the Sierra universe as Roger Wilco, King Graham or even Leisure Suit Larry. Strange that strip poker isn't included then!

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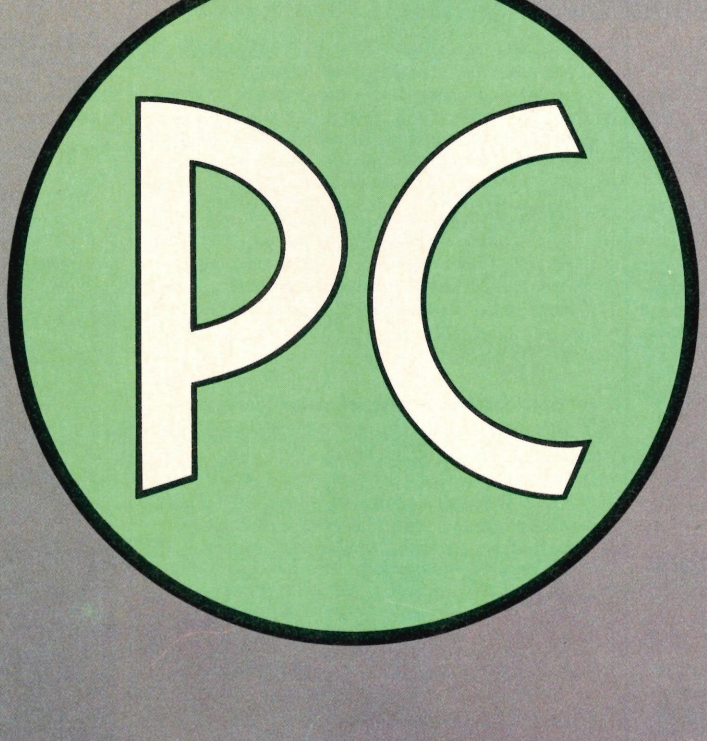

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